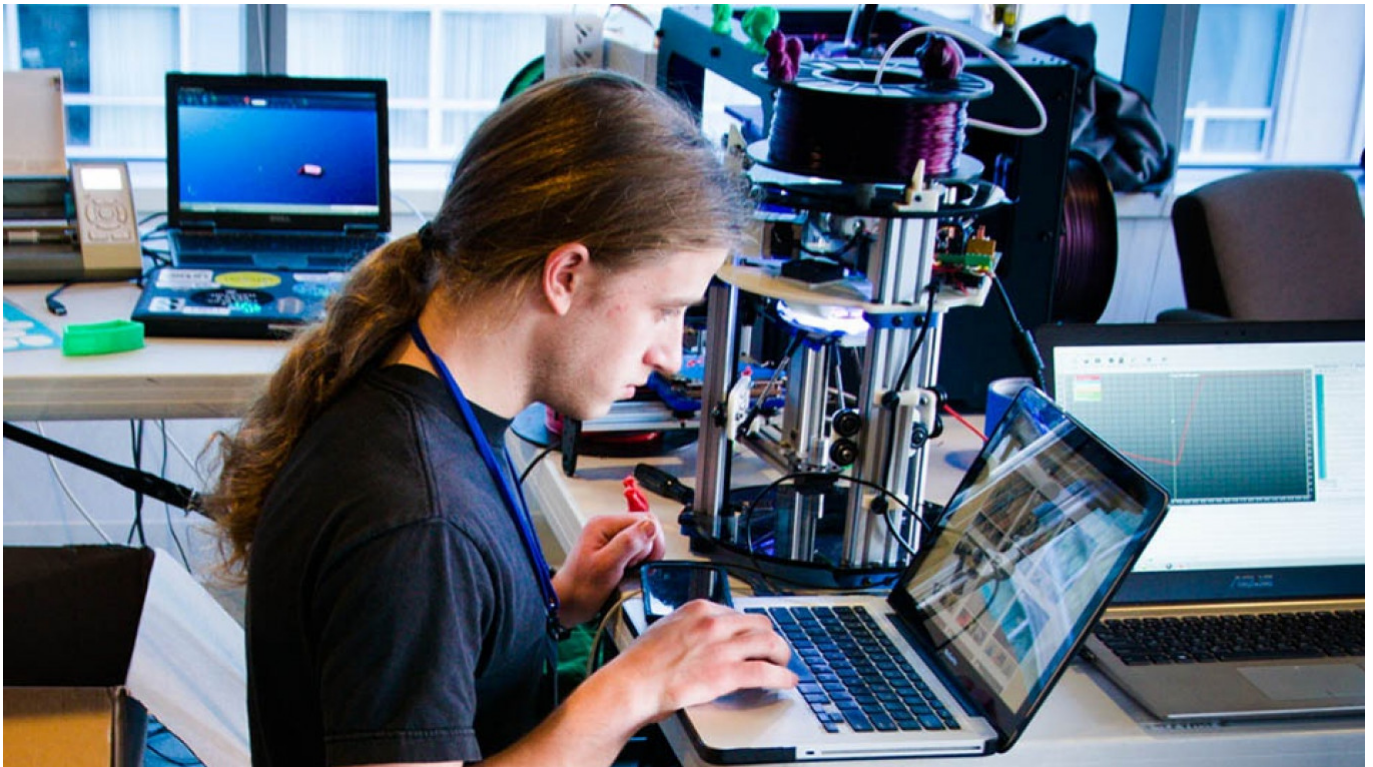


U.S. Indicts 6 Russians in Massive Pornhub Ad Fraud Involving Bots

November 28, 2018



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The United States has indicted six Russians for scamming websites including the popular adult site Pornhub out of \$36 million through a network of bots that spread fake ads.

The U.S. Justice Department on Tuesday charged a group of eight foreign nationals, including six Russians, with [committing](#) “sophisticated” digital advertising fraud. The U.S. alleges the suspects “represented to others that they ran legitimate companies that delivered advertisements to real human internet users accessing real internet webpages” between 2014 and 2018.

“In fact, the defendants faked both the users and the webpages,” reads the indictment, describing a network of automated bots mimicking real users clicking on online ads.

The Russian nationals used a type of malware that powered a three-pronged operation to infect websites including Pornhub, according to the indictment and an extensive

investigation [published](#) by the U.S. news website BuzzFeed.

“Many of the millions of computer users who downloaded the malware became infected after being tricked by misleading ads appearing on websites including the hugely popular adult site Pornhub,” BuzzFeed reported.

The world's largest pornography website has been blocked in Russia for more than two years based on a decision by the Roskomnadzor media watchdog.

Related article: [Russia Blocks Access to Adult Site Pornhub](#)

The Justice Department said the suspects accessed 1.7 million infected computers worldwide, downloaded fake sites and loaded ads onto them. The alleged scheme caused “businesses to pay more than \$29 million for ads that were never actually viewed by real human internet users.” Another ad scam with a similar structure was estimated to have brought the group \$7 million.

“Meanwhile, the owners of the infected computers were unaware that this process was running in the background on their computers,” the indictment states.

Russia’s consulate in New York said it expected one of the Russian suspects, who was arrested earlier this month in Bulgaria, to be [extradited](#). The remaining five Russian defendants are at large, the Justice Department indictment states.

“The General Consulate is keeping the situation under control,” the Russian diplomatic office [tweeted](#) late on Tuesday.

Trade groups estimate that ad fraud could generate \$19 billion this year, making it the second-most profitable illicit trade behind drug smuggling.

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