
Bell faces lawsuit over mystery calls

Hijacked modems call long distance

Phone firms now block 'dumping'

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A woman whose computer modem was hijacked and redirected to foreign countries has filed a class-action lawsuit against Bell Canada, alleging the telephone giant profited from the fraudulent long-distance charges that resulted.

Modem hijacking is known as "Internet dumping" and only affects computer users with dial-up connections. It happens when pop-up windows or Web sites secretly upload a program to a person's computer and instructs the modem to dial a number to which expensive long-distance charges apply.

The problem has existed in

Canada for years, but only recently have Bell and other telephone companies said they will prevent these unauthorized charges by automatically blocking long-distance calls to suspect locations such as Sao Tome the Cook Islands and Tuvalu.

A statement of claim, filed by Edith Carriere of Monetville Ont., alleges that Bell knew or should have known since Jan. 1 2002, that calls to these locations were associated with Internet scams.

"Bell Canada, as the largest telecommunication company in Canada, was uniquely positioned to monitor, become aware of, investigate and take proactive steps to prevent such fraudulent schemes," the claim states.

Carriere was hit with more than \$1,000 in long-distance charges and says Bell, which reduced the amount, threatened to cut off her phone if she did not pay. Bell declined to comment.