

## BT launches fresh attack on phone crime

By Alan Cane

British Telecommunications (BT) is mounting a new offensive against the barons of organised telephone crime who are costing it hundreds of millions of pounds annually. Its chief weapon is a new technology that can cut the time to detect and prove fraud from – in some cases – years to minutes. Developed with BT's former partner, MCI of the US, the system has already been tested by BT's calling card division, where it has doubled the number of frauds spotted and halved the financial losses. Now it is being deployed across BT's business services.

The level of UK phone crime is hard to assess, but it is costing operators a minimum of £200m (\$334m) a year. Trade organisations put the figure at 55,000 crimes reported, with a similar number of unreported fraudulent calls. And forget youngsters and amateurs: telephone fraud is big-time crime. Some of the UK's best-known villains are defrauding the

operators to fund activities ranging from drugs to terrorism, according to Dennis Gots, head of BT's investigations unit. 'This is more than stealing 10p from a call box,' he says. 'Notorious individuals in the criminal fraternity are involved. They know BT's network and they know what they are doing.'

Telephone crime can be absurdly easy. Opening an account in a false name and selling calls to international destinations before disappearing when the bill is due is one of the simplest. In one case earlier this year, a gang of Tamil sympathisers siphoned off or diverted some £2m from 400,000 fraudulent calls to Sri Lanka before they were arrested, convicted and imprisoned.

It took BT's investigators two years to collect the evidence to put the gang on trial. The new system, called 'Sheriff', will be able to do the job in minutes. Detection involves analysis of hundreds of millions of call records looking for unusual patterns: an unexpectedly

large number of calls to a particular number or destination, for example, or calls made at unusual hours or from unusual locations.

BT's fraud strategy manager said the company's services were already protected, but by individual systems. The need was for a single system so fraud alert data could be shared across product lines.

Sheriff uses artificial intelligence for analysis and an advanced 'object-orientated' database from Versant, a US company, to provide the speed and reliability needed to sort through a minimum of 120m calls a day on BT's network. The system 'learns' from its experiences, so improving its ability to detect future frauds.

BT is considering offering a tailored fraud-detection service to its large corporate customers.

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### Vocabulary tasks

#### A References

Who or what do the underlined words refer to?

- 1 who are costing (line 4) *the barons of organised telephone crime*
- 2 Its chief weapon (line 6)
- 3 where it has doubled the number of frauds (line 13)
- 4 This is more than stealing 10p from a call box (line 32)
- 5 they know what they are doing (line 37)
- 6 before they were arrested (line 49)
- 7 its ability to detect fraud (line 78)
- 8 to its large corporate customers (line 81)

## B Word search

Replace the underlined items with words and phrases from the text that have a similar meaning.

- 1 BT is preparing a new attack against telephone fraud. (para 1)  
offensive.....
- 2 The system has increased the number of detected crimes. (para 1)  
d..... the n..... of f..... s.....
- 3 Telephone fraud is very serious. (para 2)  
b.....-t..... c.....
- 4 One form of the crime is selling calls to others and then failing to meet the bill. (para 3)  
d..... w..... the b..... is d.....
- 5 BT experts took two years to find enough evidence to take the criminals to court. (para 4)  
p..... the g..... on t.....
- 6 The system uses an advanced computer programme that identifies patterns of calls. (para 6)  
a..... o.....-o..... d.....
- 7 The company may offer a fraud-detection service to its business customers that is specially designed for each customer. (para 7)  
t.....

## C Complete the sentence

Use an appropriate word or phrase from the box to complete each sentence.

detect prove barons of organised crime fraud false name evidence arrested convicted imprisoned
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- 1 It is one thing to .... *detect* ..... fraud; it is quite another to ..... it.
- 2 Telephone ..... is said to be in the hands of .....
- 3 The police cannot prosecute a criminal without .....
- 4 One gang managed to steal millions before they were ....., ..... and .....
- 5 Opening an account in a ..... seems to be very simple.

## Reading tasks

### A Understanding main points

Read the text on the opposite page about telephone fraud and answer these questions.

- 1 Who pays the bills when there is telephone crime?
- 2 What is BT's calling card division?
- 3 How much does telephone crime cost operators a year?
- 4 How many fraudulent calls are made each year according to trade organisations?
- 5 Is telephone crime mainly committed by professional criminals or bored youngsters?
- 6 What is the simplest example of telephone crime mentioned in the text?
- 7 How does BT plan to protect itself from fraud?
- 8 How has new technology helped BT solve crimes?

### B Understanding details

What do the following figures refer to in the text?

- 1 \$334m    2 55,000    3 400,000    4 £2m    5 120m

### C Complete the sentence

Use an appropriate word from the text to complete the six stages of a telephone crime.

- 1 A criminal has to open an *account*.....
- 2 Next, he has to give a ..... name.
- 3 The crime consists of making contact with people who need to ..... a lot of expensive phone calls but have little money.
- 4 These people agree to ..... the criminal in cash for the calls they make – not the real costs of course, much less.
- 5 The criminal then sells hundreds of long- ..... phone calls – to Australia, for example.
- 6 However, when the bill is ..... at the end of the month, the criminal disappears.

**D Definitions**

Match these terms with their definitions.

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1 siphon off and divert | a) hold someone at a police station                          |
| 2 arrest                | b) implement a serious campaign against an enemy             |
| 3 convict               | c) move part of something without the owner knowing about it |
| 4 imprison              | d) put someone in prison                                     |
| 5 mount an offensive    | e) find someone guilty of a crime                            |

**E Word fields**

Write these words in the appropriate columns.

murder arson robbery assault fraud forgery perjury burglary  
money laundering rape kidnapping bribery blackmail

**crimes against people**

..... *murder* .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**other crimes**

..... *arson* .....

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