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## Ongoing Attempts to Scam Real Estate Agents

Consumer Protection would like to inform the industry of another attempt to defraud the market.

In December 2011, the principal of a real estate business informed the Major Fraud Squad of an e-mail she received from a person who claimed to be the owner of a property she was managing.

The e-mail asserted the owner was currently overseas and required monies (rent) to be forwarded to his current location.

Detectives discovered the e-mail address used by the offenders mirrored the e-mail address of the genuine owner. This process is known as spoofing, that is, deceiving people into believing an email or website originates from a source it does not. Investigators believe the offender/s hacked into the genuine owner's computer and stole his personal information which included details of the properties being managed on his behalf. The offender then tried to deceive the real estate agent into sending funds overseas.

The Major Fraud Squad established the offender/s were located in Nigeria after identifying the scammer's computer IP address and advised agents:

- To check the e-mail address of a purported owner with the genuine owner's records on file.
- To minimise the affect of "spoofing", never send an e-mail back to a purported owner by pushing the reply field (the e-mail will be sent back to a possible offender). Either hit the **forward e-mail** field or the **create new** e-mail field and retype the address of the owner (recorded in the business records).

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- Send confirmation of any change of contact details for clients, especially changes prior to a sale, to the original email and postal addresses and also contact the client at the previous phone number to double check

In this case the real estate agent was alert to the scam and hit the **forward e-mail** field and established the e-mail address of the sender was not the same as the e-mail address that first appeared in her inbox.

When dealing with an absentee owner, whether they are overseas, intrastate or interstate, Consumer Protection advises agents to make further inquiries regarding identity and seek additional evidence whenever:

- There has been a recent change of address or other contact details.
- The transaction originates from overseas especially from countries known for scams, such as Nigeria.
- There is a request for funds to be sent to a different bank account normally used by the client, or to offshore accounts including China.
- New email addresses being used are generic such as Hotmail, Yahoo or Gmail.
- Communication is not the usual style used by the owner or their English is uncharacteristically poor.