

Craigslist User Indicted For Counterfeit Money, Software

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MANHATTAN—An advertiser on the Craigslist Web site has been indicted for selling counterfeit U.S. currency, phony certified checks and money orders associated with some of the nation's largest credit, banking and retail institutions.

Through the same criminal scheme, forged New York City and federal government documents and pirated computer software were also allegedly being sold, according to Manhattan district attorney Robert Morgenthau.

The defendant, Malikim Brown, aka Xavier, 36, of Manhattan, was arrested on Sept. 18 after completing a pre-arranged transaction with an undercover detective in which Brown sold counterfeit U.S. currency, American Express and Visa Travelers Cheques, a U.S. Postal Service money order and pirated computer software.

Following his arrest, police executed a search warrant on a four-bedroom Manhattan apartment formerly occupied by Brown's late grandmother and converted into a base for his criminal operation. Inside, police recovered over \$25,000 in counterfeit U.S. currency, including both individual bills and uncut sheets of bills; an extensive computer and printing system, including a flatbed scanner with genuine currency resting on the glass; dozens of pre-printed counterfeit bank checks and money orders, including those issued by Wells Fargo, Wachovia, Bank of America and Washington Mutual banks, the Postal Service and MoneyGram International; various forged government documents; and an inventory of pirated computer software.

The investigation began in August 2007 when an advertisement was found in which software made by companies such as Microsoft, Adobe Systems and Symantec, many of which retail from hundreds to thousands of dollars per unit, were being offered for cents on the dollar. After initial contact was made with Brown through Craigslist, an undercover detective began making direct purchases of pirated Microsoft products from Brown.

During one of the software purchases, Brown allegedly showed the undercover detective a sample of counterfeit U.S. currency and offered it for sale. After selling the undercover detective increasing quantities of counterfeit money, Brown allegedly offered to sell counterfeit travelers checks and money orders. Over the course of the investigation, Morgenthau said Brown sold the undercover detective over \$10,000 in counterfeit U.S. currency and over \$15,000 in counterfeit American Express and Visa Travelers Cheques, JP Morgan Chase certified bank checks, U.S. Postal Service money orders and MoneyGrams co-branded with Wal-Mart, CVS/pharmacy and the American Automobile Association (AAA).

The investigation revealed that some of the same serial numbers printed on counterfeit money sold by Brown had appeared on counterfeit currency tendered for purchases all over the United States, including Orlando, Florida; Austin, Texas; Los Angeles, California, and; Anchorage, Alaska. It was also determined that serial numbers appearing on some of the travelers checks sold by Brown had been previously linked to a Lagos, Nigeria-based counterfeiting ring. To date, over 14,000 travelers checks connected to that overseas criminal enterprise have been presented for payment—largely for Internet-based transactions—with a total dollar value of \$6,700,000.

As the investigation continued, Brown offered to sell City of New York birth certificates, federal social security cards and complete W-2 tax returns all of which could be used to obtain government-issued identification and lines of credit in the name of the person listed on the documents in each set. BROWN then proceeded to sell numerous phony documents to the undercover detective, each containing a forged City of New York birth certificate, Social Security card and completed W-2 federal income tax return.

Throughout the investigation, Brown was found to be posting dozens of advertisements on Craigslist, offering to sell everything, including discount computer software, term paper writing services and airtime on local-access public television.
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