On Friday morning the 12th of August 2005 at 07:09 my fax received a prospectus claiming to be from a marketing company (let’s call it Orfilian Corp) on behalf of a high-tech startup (let’s call it Bazoonium Corp)(and yes, I checked both names on GOOGLE and they didn’t show up). The fax urged people to buy the stock, claiming it would be rising in value by orders of magnitude within months. It also included a toll-free number for getting out of the junk-fax list (I didn’t dial it) and claimed that Orfilian Corp had received lots of shares in return for touting the stock.

I dialed *69 on my fax machine to determine the origin of this junk fax; it was reported by the automated system as aaa-eee-nnnn (details concealed to protect the guilty). Unfortunately, that number did not produce any identification of the owner using the reverse lookup feature of Switchboard.com < http://www.switchboard.com/bin/cgirlookup.dll >; neither did the get-out-of-junk number. Then (duhh) I realized that the area code was in Canada, so I tried a Canadian reverse lookup < http://www.whitepages.com/10592/reverse-phone > but had no luck there either.

I looked up Orfilian Corp on the Web but had no luck finding contact information (they use a Web form for e-mail enquiries) so I used a DNS lookup on < orfilian.com > with SamSpade v1.4 < http://www.samspade.org/ssw/ >, found the phone number in the DNS entry and heard a phone message from the system administrator explicitly stating that their company does not send junk fax and they didn’t know where the particular stock-touting fax came from.

Using the same WHOIS technique on bazoonium.com via SamSpade, I spoke with Dr Whatever from Bazoonium Corp; he was very nice and thoroughly exasperated by the inclusion of his company’s name in this junk fax. He and his colleagues had already received several phone calls from angry recipients of the same junk fax I got. The company is currently involved in a merger and there are 6M shares in public hands. Dr Whoever was concerned that the bad publicity from the fake fax might harm the company at this sensitive time. I suggested that he obtain affidavits from everyone in the company affirming their complete lack of involvement in this junk fax and that he keep a record of possible financial losses resulting from the fraud (all of this after the usual IANAL warning – “I am not a lawyer and this is not legal advice: for legal advice, consult an attorney”).

More in the next column.

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