Phishing paying off in US
Correspondents in Washington
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SOME 57 million US internet users have received emails luring them to fake websites in an effort to obtain bank or credit card information, a new survey has found.

The survey, on the scheme known as "phishing", by research firm Gartner, also estimated that this type of fraud cost US banks and credit card issuers about $US1.2 billion ($1.66 billion) last year.

The scheme uses emails designed to look as if they come from a bank or financial institution, and directs the recipient to a website where they are asked to "verify" personal data or credit card numbers.

Gartner analysts said that based on the survey, some 30 million adult internet users are almost certain to have received one of these pitches and another 27 million may have received them.

These schemes have a higher success rate than many other fraud attempts, according to the Gartner survey completed in April.

Gartner estimates that about 19 per cent of those receiving the phishing emails, or nearly 11 million US adults users, have clicked on the link in a phishing email. And some three per cent, or an estimated 1.78 million adults, report giving phishers their financial or personal information.

The data indicates "phishing attack victims are almost three times as prone to identity-theft related fraud as other online consumers," said Avivah Litan, vice president and research director at Gartner.
"Anyway you look at it, the crooks are achieving their goals with the execution of phishing attacks. Service providers have no choice but to combat these fraudulent emails if networked computing is to become more trusted as a favoured channel for customer transactions."

Phishing attacks are not new, but they have become more pervasive in the past 12 months. According to the Gartner survey, 76 per cent of the known or suspected phishing scams occurred within since October 2003, and another 16 per cent occurred during the six months before then.

"Financial institutions, internet service providers, and other service providers must take phishing seriously," Litan said.

Aside from direct financial losses, experts note that these incidents can lead to identity theft with a more profound impact.