



CALLER ID spoofing

On January 9, 2019, Chicago Title's Lynnwood, Washington office opened a sale transaction. The sale transaction was not scheduled to close until February 13, 2019. However, three weeks before the closing, the buyer started receiving emails from someone he thought was his real estate agent that read as follows:

From: Selling Agent
Sent: Thursday, January 24, 2019 9:13 AM
To: Home Buyer
Subject: Closing And Funding
Good Morning Mark,

I had a chat with the title closer regarding funding and they advised to have the funds available in escrow prior to closing as this is part of their company's policy to avoid any delay that may occur due to the closing funds being late, please do let me know if you guys can start moving funds to escrow today so I can provide you with your cash to close amount and escrow wiring instructions for the funds.

I am in a realty seminar most of today, but I do have access to my email. Please drop me an email to let me know what you wish to do so I can follow up with them.

On January 24, 2019, at 10:48 PM, Home Buyer wrote:

I can move the money anytime. I have never wired money before. I am also in town tomorrow and I could drop them a check as well.

On January 24, 2019, at 9:27 AM, Selling Agent wrote:

Due to the Good Funds Law and banking practices, please note that the title only accept personal checks up to \$1,000, cashier's checks for \$1,000 to \$5,000 and must have a wire for all transactions requiring funds for more than \$50,000... Since your cash to close amount is \$145,440.89 you will have to wire funds directly to escrow. Please let me know how you wish to proceed so I can follow up and get you the wiring instructions for the wire.

On January 24, 2019, at 11:11 PM, Home Buyer wrote:

Also, that amount does not match the amount Jon noted in the load docs.

On January 24, 2019, at 9:50 AM, Selling Agent wrote:

How much did Jon noted in the loan doc so I can cross check this with the title closer and surely will verify the wiring instructions before forwarding to you.

On January 24, 2019, at 11:24 PM, Home Buyer wrote:

\$144,750

On January 24, 2019, at 11:30 PM, Selling Agent wrote:

I will confirm this amount but remember this is not inclusive of the closing cost but will get back to you shortly.

On January 24, 2019, at 11:16 AM, Selling Agent wrote:

I have confirmed with escrow, amount to wire is \$144,750 and the closing cost will be taken care of at closing with cashier's check. Please confirm if this can be taken care of today so I can provide you with the wiring instructions.

On January 25, 2019, at 12:55 AM, Home Buyer wrote:

What other closing costs are there?

On January 24, 2019, at 11:36 AM, Selling Agent wrote:

ADDITIONAL CHARGES:

Selling Broker Transaction Fee to Real Estate Group Pad for adjustments at closing to be refunded after adjustments and also escrow Fee to The Title Company. In total, these fees will not be more than \$250. As I said, you can wire the cash to close amount, which is \$144,750. Let me know if I should go ahead and get you the wiring instructions for the wire today.

On January 25, 2019, at 1:10 AM, Home Buyer wrote:

Please call me when you have a break in the action. These emails seem to be going in a circle here.

On January 24, 2019, at 12:09 PM, Selling Agent wrote:

I will be rounding up late today. Please drop me an email if you have any questions and I will get back to you as soon as I can. If you do not mind I can have the escrow coordinator give you a call. Please let me know..

Next, the home buyer received a phone call that the homebuyer's caller ID indicated was someone from Chicago Title Company. The person said her name was Maryanne and came across very rude and with broken English, telling the home buyer that he needed to wire funds today.

The home buyer replied he had been working and speaking with Allie, and he needed confirmation from her. The home buyer asked "Maryanne" to have Allie call him back directly. Maryanne replied, "Okay, she will call you." and she abruptly ended the call.

Being suspicious, the home buyer decided to call Allie himself with a phone number that Allie had provided in an up-front phone call to the home buyer. At the time the order was opened, Allie explained the escrow procedure for sending wire information to make the home buyer aware of the possibility of wire fraud in his transaction.

The home buyer remembered that phone call vividly and remembered Allie's voice when she picked up the phone. He told Allie about the email conversation he thought he was having with his agent and the phone call from Maryanne.

Allie assured him no one from their office was named Maryanne and no one from Chicago Title Company called him to convince him to wire his closing funds three weeks in advance of his closing, even though the phone number appeared to be from Chicago Title Company.

Allie and the home buyer felt relieved the buyer had been warned this type of crime might be perpetrated in his transaction. The warning raised his awareness enough to be suspicious of the emails and phone call he received. Luckily, he did not wire his down payment to the fraudster.

MORAL OF THE STORY

There are apps available online that enable the caller to appear to be someone else: Either the caller changes the number to appear to be legitimate or actually changes the name of the caller to appear to be the settlement agent or real estate agent's company or even the agent's personal name. They call in an attempt to convince the buyer of the urgency of sending a wire or texting them urgently to send a wire for their down payment and closing costs.