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## Calls for fake ads plague city business owners Offer computer equipment free

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*Nolan Hargreaves is a victim of Internet harassment.*

**FALSE** Internet ads offering computer equipment for free and selling a beater Honda for \$600 had phones ringing off the hook Monday for two Winnipeg men who are victims of the mean-spirited hoax.

Nolan Hargreaves is a bit of a computer geek and runs a home-based computer business but when the calls started coming, they hung him up but good all day.

"Someone has taken my business phone number and they have put about 10 to 20 ads on UsedWinnipeg.com, giving away free items such as Ipod nano, computer monitors, computer with two gigs RAM and duo core processor, and selling items like cars, ridiculously cheap," Hargreaves, owner of ICON PC repair, said.

The other man, Lawrence Pierrard said, "I'm being harassed. People don't realize it's a fake ad. They're phoning and saying, 'I'm replying to the ad about TVs or computers'. Other times, it's about a free computer. It's just wild."

Pierrard and Hargreaves are not acquainted. The only thing in common is they've posted legitimate computer-repair ads on Kijiji in the past.

Pierrard took his first call Sunday night. Hargreaves logged 80 calls Monday morning alone.

"I got my first call about 5:30 a.m.," Hargreaves said. "It woke me up; they said, 'I'm calling about the free iPod.' and I said, 'What free iPod?' And I've gotten 60 calls or maybe 70 phone calls since. And a bunch of text messages, too.

"My phone will not stop ringing and this has completely crippled my business," Hargreaves said.

The sound of phones ringing in the background punctuated calls to Hargreaves.

Conducting business was next to impossible with incessant beeps from call-waiting on the line.

At 26, Hargreaves is a young husband and a father to a two-year-old, with another baby on the way.

"It's a rough time to be handling these phone calls. My wife is nine months pregnant and she's due next week," Hargreaves said.

By afternoon, Hargreaves had good news and bad news.

The ads on UsedWinnipeg were gone. But they'd popped up on the Canadian Internet classified ad site, [kijiji.net/ca](http://kijiji.net/ca).

One ad was for a 1995 Honda hatchback for sale for \$600 and the other was a dirt-cheap computer repair ad. Both ads were fake.

Hargreaves was still working on getting the ads removed late Monday afternoon. He said Winnipeg police advised him to contact the Government of Canada anti-fraud website to report the problem.

"I haven't lost a large sum of money, other than my time and potential income for today," Hargreaves said.

"The police officer said I could get an incident number but it is very unlikely to help because they would have to get warrant from Kijiji or UsedWinnipeg and 99 per cent of the time, people use fake information in their emails when they (commit) fraud like this," Hargreaves said.

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#### What you can do

If you've lost time and income, but not been a victim of identity theft or lost money directly as a result of Internet scams, police may decide not to investigate.

Police are the only authorities able to order an IP address from Internet sites like Kijiji and they require a warrant. Victims can report Internet fraud to a site run by the Government of Canada at: <http://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/>