

Clippings are brief summaries of recent news articles in the consumer media. These stories offer a peek at how garage door companies and products are being reported to the public.

New York Times exposes Bad Bob locksmiths

Source: David Segal, "When locksmiths pick pockets," *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 2016, page BU1.

"Odds are good that when you search Google for someone to help you get into your home or car, results will include poorly trained subcontractors who will squeeze you for cash."

So begins this 4,000-word article in America's premier newspaper. If you replace "home or car" with "garage," this story could've been about "Bad Bob" garage door repair scammers. It's primarily about locksmiths, but the two schemes are identical in many respects.

The article, written by David Segal, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, identifies the following tactics by Bad Bob locksmiths. See if these 10 tactics sound familiar.

- They use "call centers that are often out of state."
- They dominate Google AdWords, promising an inexpensive service call.
- Some own hundreds of domain names, all intended to snag customers in the scheme.
- They "use a high-tech ruse to trick Google into presenting them as physical stores in your neighborhood" which often have phony street addresses.
- One Bad Bob hired a tech, "gave him a week of training and told him he could keep 40 percent of every job. His instructions were to size up each customer and ask for as much money as possible."
- Many techs later establish their own operations.
- Their goal "is to wrest as much money as possible from every

- customer ... often claiming that the work was more complicated than expected."
- "Their priority is not repeat customers. It's quick cash."
- They often get an "F rating from the Better Business Bureau, along with a list of nearly identical complaints."
- Due to the Bad Bobs' deceptive advertising, honest companies are losing business.

The reporter sees the connection to our industry. He says this scheme "has migrated to an array of services, including garage door repair, carpet cleaning, moving, and home security."

The story quotes John Ware, an assistant United States attorney in St. Louis: "I'm not exaggerating when I say these guys have people in every large and midsize city in the United States."

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— U.S. Attorney

Google: the problem and the solution?

Here's the most helpful part of the article: it sees Google as the problem and the potential solution. "Too many consumers are still

getting ripped off because Google ... is perennially a step behind a group of sophisticated swindlers."

Segal actually got a response from a Google spokesman, who said, "We're in a constant arms race with local business spammers who, unfortunately, use all sorts of tricks to try to game our system. ... We're continually working on new, better ways to keep them off Google Search and Maps. There's work to do, and we want to keep doing better."

Editor's note: For me, the most gratifying part of the article is learning that federal prosecutors and Google are aware of the problem and are actively seeking ways to stop it.

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Growing problem: GDO transmitter thefts

We've been reporting for several years about the problem of burglars targeting garage door opener remote controls as a way to get into homes. The problem continues to grow. Here are examples worth reading.

Teens steal transmitter, murder homeowner

Source: "6 teens indicted in bartender's shooting," KOAT-TV Albuquerque, N.M., July 10 and 24, 2015. The story was also in the Associated Press and Daily Mail (London, UK).

In a story that made international news, an Albuquerque burglary escalated to a murder. Six teens were arrested after one of them gunned down a 60-year-old man in his driveway after he apparently confronted their burglary attempt.

The report said, "They had been prowling through a neighborhood, burglarizing cars and homes and stealing vehicles." In the murder case, they had apparently used a GDO transmitter taken from the car of the victim's wife.

The victim died of multiple gunshot wounds. Another burglarized homeowner said the teens shot at him also but missed.

The youths, who ranged in age from 14 to 17, were reported to be "mobbing." A grand jury indicted each of them for 40 charges, including murder.

At a press conference, an angry daughter of the victim said, "I want to address the parents of these animals. Why did you let your children run the streets at 3 am?" Police urged residents to take transmitters out of cars at night.

Stealing transmitters from cars at church

Source: Joe Enea, "Police: Gilbert man takes advantage of Mesa worshippers," ABC15, Phoenix, Ariz., Feb. 17, 2016.

In this Mesa, Ariz., case, police say a burglar went to a church parking lot, found an unlocked car, grabbed the GDO remote control and the owner's home address from the registration slip, then drove to the house and ransacked and burglarized the home—all while the family was in church. Jewelry and electronics were taken.

The burglar was eventually caught and reportedly admitted to the theft. Authorities are working to connect this theft to a string of similar unsolved burglaries in the area. Another family that attends the same church reported a similar incident that started with the theft of their remote control.

More GDO transmitter thefts throughout North America

California. This article identified "the disturbing trend" of burglars stealing garage door openers from cars so they can get into homes. One victim was parked at a hospital. Thieves broke the window, stole the remote, and took the registration in the glove box. They then went to the homeowner's address, ransacked the home, all while the homeowner was visiting at the hospital. *(Source: "Garage door remotes tops on a burglar's list," ConsumerAffairs.com., April 22, 2015.)*

British Columbia. This Canadian story reported an increase in residential break-ins where GDO remotes were used to access the homes. In one case, a car was stolen while the family slept.

Police said, "You wouldn't normally leave your house key in your vehicle, and the door opener is practically a key to the palace." They recommended removing the opener from the vehicle when parked.

(Source: "Garage door openers used in Langley home break-ins," Aldergrove Star, Langley, B.C., April 24, 2015.)

Florida. Over four days, Boynton Beach police responded to five calls where someone apparently broke into a home using a garage door opener taken from a car parked in the driveway. In several cases, homeowners were asleep in the home during the break-in. Laptops, cash, liquor, a bicycle, and cellphones were taken. Police recommended bringing your garage door remote inside when you're home.

(Source: "Police: Thieves are stealing garage door openers to break into homes," WPTV 5, West Palm Beach, Fla., Aug. 4, 2015.)

Missouri. In this series of break-ins, homeowners left their cars unlocked with the GDO remotes inside. The openers were used "to get into homes and

steal cash, credit cards, and at least one car."

Police recommended that homeowners lock their garage doors.

(Source: "Garage door openers tools for thieves in Des Peres break-ins," KMOV-TV, St. Louis, Mo., July 27, 2015.)

"You wouldn't normally leave your house key in your vehicle, and the door opener is practically a key to the palace."

California. This San

Diego story cites a long list of cases

that involve burglars going after GDO remote controls in cars. One victim attempted to resolve the issue by changing the code the next morning. Police urged citizens to remove garage door remotes from parked vehicles.

(Source: "Burglars rifle cars for remotes," San Diego Reader, Calif., July 31, 2015.)

Editor's note: As we've said before, garage door dealers can play a helpful role in keeping customers safe. Whenever you sell a garage door opener, warn your customers to keep transmitters always locked up and out of sight. Many manufacturers sell miniature remotes that can be kept in a purse or pocket. LiftMaster, for example, will be launching a new upscale mini-remote at Expo 2016.