

US/World News

Hacker Albert Gonzalez charged with largest ID theft ever involving 130 Million credit, debit cards

BY [JAMES GORDON MEEK](#)
DAILY NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

Updated Tuesday, August 18th 2009, 10:48 AM

A hacker has been charged with the largest case of ID theft ever.

A computer hacker known as "Soupnazi" swiped **more than 135 million credit and debit card numbers** from top chains like **7-Eleven** - the largest theft ever of its kind, prosecutors charged yesterday.

Albert Gonzalez, 28, of Miami, apparently broke his own previous eye-popping record of 40 million card numbers stolen from stores such as **T.J. Maxx**, **Barnes & Noble** and **Boston Market**.



He was already jailed in Brooklyn under federal indictment for those crimes and is awaiting a September trial on Long Island for hacking the **Dave & Buster's** restaurant chain in 2006.

"He's a prolific guy," said one senior law enforcement official after his federal indictment yesterday in New Jersey on two counts of hacking.

Gonzalez was a Secret Service informant several years ago until agents learned he was still moonlighting as a cyberthief.

Millions of Americans potentially had their credit compromised by the time feds discovered their snitch had planted "sniffer" software on corporate computers. The victims included:

- **130 million numbers** pirated from **Heartland Payment Systems**, a major national card transaction processor that serves 250,000 retail locations. It reported \$32 million in related losses recently.

- **4.2 million** from **Hannaford Brothers** food markets in upstate New York and New England.
- An unknown number from the **7-Eleven** convenience store chain with 5,800 U.S. stores.

A federal source said "some victims have been alerted" to fraudulent use of their cards, but no major effort is underway to alert consumers beyond publicizing Gonzalez's indictments.

Officials urged cardholders to closely examine their monthly statements and call their bank or credit card company if they find suspicious charges. Consumers can also examine free annual personal credit reports from www.annualcreditreport.com.

Two years ago, Gonzalez and two unnamed Russian hackers began attacking 7-Eleven with "malware" secretly placed inside their computers, the indictment alleged.

Court papers said that attack harvested "an undetermined number" of card numbers from the convenience store giant.

Officials could not calculate the total cost of the thefts, but a Justice source told The News that "the cards are showing up" in fraud cases nationwide.

"It's substantial," surmised Kevin Mitnick, the world-famous ex-hacker who served four years in prison after an FBI manhunt a decade ago and is now a security consultant.

The cost of reissuing cards and dealing with the massive theft may result in "damage in the millions," Mitnick said.

"They got in major brands, which shows the vulnerability on the Internet," he added.

Prosecutors did not charge Gonzalez got cash for the card numbers from Eastern European bulk buyers - a common practice among card hackers - but said he led a conspiracy that "offered for sale" stolen numbers.