

# Calif. Man Gets 4 Years For Stalking On Facebook

BY JUDY LIN  
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A California man who trolled women's Facebook pages searching for clues that allowed him to take over their email accounts was sentenced Friday to more than four years in state prison after a judge rejected a plea for a lighter sentence and likened the man to a peeping Tom.

Once he took over women's email accounts, George Bronk searched their folders for nude or semi-nude photographs or videos sent to their husbands or boyfriends and distributed the images to their contact list, prosecutors said.

The emails went to families, friends and co-workers. Women in 17 states, the District of Columbia and England were victimized.

"This case serves as a stark example of what occurs in so-called cyberspace. It has very real consequences," Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Lawrence Brown said. "The intrusion of one's profile is no different than intruding one's home."

Bronk, 24, pleaded guilty in January to charges that included computer intrusion, false impersonation and possession of child pornography.

Brown sentenced him to four years in state prison for the charges related to the Facebook and email offenses, and added eight more months for charges related to child pornography.

Bronk's attorney, Monica Lynch, said her client took responsibility for his actions and showed remorse. She had sought a sentence of one year in local jail with probation afterward, or two years in state prison with no probation.

Brown based his decision on a sentencing recommendation by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The evaluation stated that Bronk demonstrated remorse and quoted the self-identified alcoholic as saying, "If I could go back with the knowledge that I have now, I would not have done any of the things I did."

But the state expressed concern about his lack of understanding about the severity of his crime and noted Bronk had demonstrated "a high degree of

callousness." The evaluation said he used the child pornographic videos and images "as an instrument designed to inflict pain and humiliation on the very people he stole the images from."

Bronk was living in the Sacramento suburb of Citrus Heights taking care of his ailing parents in December 2009 when he began scanning Facebook with the intent of taking over email accounts.

The practice continued until last September.

He looked for email accounts on Facebook pages then gleaned enough personal information from postings to answer basic security questions, such as the name of an elementary school or favorite color.

After he changed passwords and took over accounts, Bronk would search folders for compromising photos and distribute them publicly, prosecutors said.

He even taunted some of the women in online exchanges and coerced at least one into sending him more explicit photographs by threatening to distribute the pictures he already had.

Danielle Piscak, 22, of Parkland, Wash., told The Associated Press earlier this year that she was able to contact the person who had hacked into her email account and ask why he was doing it.

She said Bronk's reply was, "Because it's funny."

The case illustrates the vulnerability of all Internet users, said prosecuting attorney Robert Morgester of the state attorney general's office.

"The victims we went to said 'I had very robust passwords.' But it didn't matter how robust the password was if the recovery question is easy," he said. "Lost your password? What's your favorite color or what high school did you go to? Or what's your dog's name? And he was able to glean that information from social media."

Investigators used information from Bronk's confiscated computer to email questionnaires to 3,200 of his Internet contacts, asking if they had been victimized.

Forty-six women said they had.

Investigators also said they found 172 email files with explicit photographs on Bronk's

computer.

Lynch has said her client was immature, unemployed and bored while he cared for his parents.

His parents declined comment after the sentencing.

At a hearing earlier this year, his mother, Joyce Bronk, said her son told them he needed help for a drinking problem then began attending Alcoholics Anonymous

and taking classes to be trained as an emergency medical technician.

"This was an Internet persona he created when he was a drunk," she said at the time as a way to explain his actions.

In seeking a lighter sentence, his parents offered in a letter to take away Internet access as a condition of releasing him back to their custody.


Authorities started investigating after one victim called Connecticut State Police, which referred the complaint to the California Highway Patrol.

Victims turned up in Alabama, Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Bronk was arrested in October. He had hoped to become a paramedic but will not be able to because he will have to register as a sex offender as a result of his crimes, his attorney said.

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