

### Which operating system crackers use?

Operating systems used by crackers vary. Macintosh is the least likely platform for a cracker; there simply aren't enough tools available for MacOS, and the tools needed are too much trouble to port. UNIX is the most likely platform and of that class, probably FreeBSD or Linux.

The most obvious reason for this is cost. For the price of a \$39 book on Linux (with the accompanying CD-ROM), a cracker gets everything he could ever need in the way of tools: C, C++, Smalltalk, Perl, TCP/IP, and much more. Moreover, he gets the full source code to his operating system.

This cost issue is not trivial. Even older workstations can be expensive. Your money will buy more computing power if you stay with an IBM compatible. Today, you can get a 100MHz PC with 8MB of RAM for \$300. You can put either FreeBSD or Linux on that machine and suddenly, you have a powerful workstation. Conversely, that same \$300 might buy you a 25MHz SPARCstation 1 with a disk, monitor, and keyboard kit. Or perhaps an ELC with an external disk and 16MB of RAM. Compounding this is the problem of software. If you get an old Sun, chances are that you will also be receiving SunOS 4.1.x. If so, a C compiler (cc) comes stock. However, if you buy an RS/6000 with AIX 4.1.x, you get a better deal on the machine but you are forced to get a C compiler. This will probably entail getting GCC from the Internet. As you might guess, a C compiler is imperative. Without it, you cannot build the majority of tools distributed from the void. This is a big consideration and one reason that Linux is becoming much more popular.

I should mention that professional crackers (those who get paid for their work) can probably afford any system. You can bet that those forces in American intelligence investigating cyber war are using some extreme computing power. For these individuals, licensing and cost are not issues.