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MEECES to pieces

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Max Kilger likes to get into the heads of computer criminals. He chats with these people at conferences and online, and studies their behavior when they hack inside Honeynet's decoy computers. Throughout his many years of research, he's developed a motivational profile he calls "MEECES" - for money, ego, entertainment, cause, entrance to social groups and status. MEECES is a modification of of the FBI and military security's counterespionage profile called MICE - which stands for money, ideology, compromise and ego. Kilger outlines behavioral motivators in a 60-page chapter on hacker profiling in the second edition of the Honeynet-developed book "Know Your Enemies," due from Addison Wesley in May. Here's the upshot of those motivators:

Money - Stolen credit cards become currency for certain crime rings and social groups of carders who trade them for access to other compromised credit card databases.

Ego - Spanning the entire spectrum of the community from black hat to white hat hackers, ego is the drive to solve a problem, look inside the code, see how something works, and then get it to do something it wasn't created to do.

Entertainment - The bored teenager syndrome is not as strong as in the days of big disk drives and mainframes, but it remains a motivator. "You'll still see a hacker break into a system, trash it up and sit back and watch the system administrator scurry around trying to save it," Kilger says.

Cause - Think hactivism, mostly Web site defacements and distributed denial-of-service attacks for politics and ideologies.

Entrance into social groups - Hackers achieve this by sharing their successful break-ins with the groups they want to be included in.

Status - This is the strongest motivator among all hackers, crackers and carders because their main emphasis is on skills. The higher profile the target, the higher their status.

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