

Windows Administration

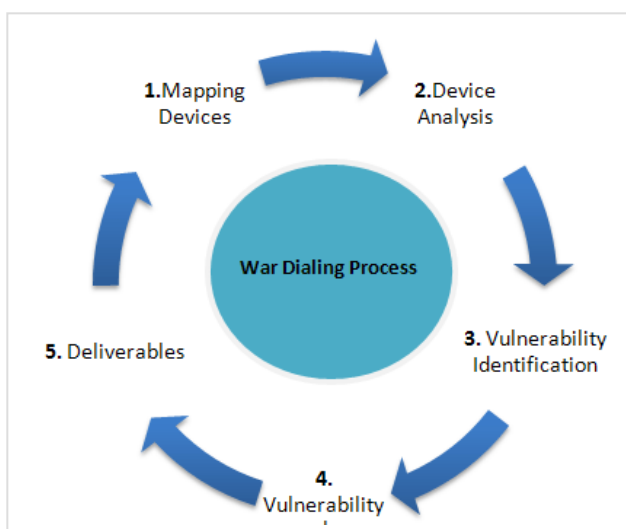
IT Systems Administrator BLOG...

TAG ARCHIVES: WAR DIALING



War Dialing

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War dialing or **wardialing** is a technique of using a [modem](#) to automatically scan a list of [telephone](#) numbers, usually dialing every number in a [local area code](#) to search for computers, [Bulletin board systems](#) and [fax machines](#). [Hackers](#) use the resulting lists for various purposes, [hobbyists](#) for exploration, and [crackers](#) – malicious hackers who specialize in computer security – for password guessing.

A single wardialing call would involve calling an unknown number, and waiting for one or two rings, since answering computers usually pick up on the first ring. If the phone rings twice, the modem hangs up and tries the next number. If a modem or fax machine answers, the wardialer program

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repeated incoming calls are especially annoying to businesses that have many consecutively numbered lines in the exchange, such as used with a [Centrex](#) telephone system.

The popularity of wardialing in 1980s and 1990s prompted some states to enact legislation prohibiting the use of a device to dial telephone numbers without the intent of communicating with a person.

The popular name for this technique originated in the 1983 film [WarGames](#). In the film, the protagonist programmed his computer to dial every telephone number in [Sunnyvale, California](#) to find other computer systems. Prior to the movie's release, this technique was known as "hammer dialing" or "[demon dialing](#)". "WarGames Dialer" programs became common on bulletin board systems of the time, with file names often truncated to wardial.exe and the like due to length restrictions of 8 characters on such systems. Eventually, the etymology of the name fell behind as "war dialing" gained its own currency within computing culture.^[1]

A more recent phenomenon is [wardriving](#), the searching for [wireless networks](#) (Wi-Fi) from a moving vehicle. Wardriving was named after wardialing, since both techniques involve [brute-force](#) searches to find computer networks. The aim of wardriving is to collect information about [wireless access points](#) (not to be confused with [piggybacking](#)).

Similar to war dialing is a [port scan](#) under TCP/IP, which "dials" every [TCP port](#) of every [IP address](#) to find out what services are available. Unlike wardialing, however, a port scan will generally not disturb a human being when it tries an IP address, regardless of whether there is a computer responding on that address or not. Related to wardriving is [warchalking](#), the practice of drawing chalk symbols in public places to advertise the availability of wireless networks.

The term is also used today by analogy for various sorts of exhaustive [brute force attack](#) against an authentication mechanism, such as a password. While a [dictionary attack](#) might involve trying each word in a dictionary as the password, "wardialing the password" would involve trying every possible password. Password protection systems are usually designed to make this impractical, by making the process slow and/or locking out an account for minutes or hours after some low number of wrong password entries.

War dialing is sometimes used as a synonym for [demon dialing](#), a related technique which also involves automating a computer modem in order to repeatedly place telephone calls.

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