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Cybersecurity

for
dummies®

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Evaluate possible
cybersecurity threats

—
Protect your family and business
against potential breaches

—
Identify the steps for recovery
after a cyber attack

Joseph Steinberg



Cybersecurity

by Joseph Steinberg

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Cybersecurity For Dummies®

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Introduction

In the course of just a single generation, the world has undergone some of the greatest changes since the dawn of mankind. The availability of the Internet as a tool for consumers and businesses alike, coupled with the invention of mobile devices and wireless networking, have ushered in an Information Revolution that has impacted just about every aspect of human existence.

This reliance on technology, however, has also created enormous risks. It seems that not a day goes by without some new story emerging of a data breach, cyberattack, or the like. Simultaneously, because humanity's reliance on technology increases on a daily basis, the potential adverse consequences of cyberattacks have grown exponentially to the point that people can now lose their fortunes, their reputations, their health, or even their lives, as the result of cyberattacks.

It is no wonder, therefore, that people living in the modern world understand the need to protect themselves from cyber-dangers. This book shows you how to do so.

About This Book

While many books have been written over the past couple decades on a wide variety of cybersecurity-related topics, most of them don't provide the general population with the information needed to properly protect themselves.

Many cybersecurity books are directed toward highly technical audiences and tend to overwhelm noncomputer scientists with extraneous information, creating severe challenges for readers seeking to translate the knowledge that they acquire from books into practical actions. On the flip side, various self-published introduction-to-cybersecurity books suffer from all sorts of serious deficiencies, including, in some cases, having been written by non-experts and presenting significant amounts of misinformation. Anyone interested in

cybersecurity often shouldn't trust these materials. Likewise, many security tip sheets and the like simply relay oft-repeated clichés and outdated advice, sometimes causing people who follow the recommendations contained within such works to worsen their cybersecurity postures rather than improve them. Furthermore, the nearly constant repetition of various cybersecurity advice by media personalities after news stories about breaches ("Don't forget to reset all your passwords!"), coupled with the lack of consequences to most people after they do not comply with such directives, has led to *cybersecurity fatigue* — a condition in which folks simply don't act when they actually need to because they have heard the "boy cry wolf" one too many times.

I wrote *Cybersecurity For Dummies* to provide people who do not work as cybersecurity professionals with a foundational book that can teach them what they need to know about cybersecurity and explain why they need to know it. This book offers you practical, clear, and straightforward advice that you can easily translate into actions that can help keep you and your children, parents, and small businesses cybersecure.

Cybersecurity For Dummies is divided into several parts. [Parts 1, 2](#), and [3](#) provide an overview of cybersecurity and give tips on protecting yourself and your loved ones from both external threats and from making dangerous (and potentially disastrous) mistakes. Topics such as how to secure your online accounts and how to select and protect passwords fall into these parts of the book.

[Part 4](#) offers tips on securing small businesses, which may be especially pertinent for small business owners and employees. [Part 4](#) then also discusses some of the unique security needs that face firms as they grow larger and touches on cybersecurity-in-government related matters.

[Part 5](#) shows you how to identify security breaches. [Part 6](#) covers the process of backing up, something that you should do proactively before the need to recover arises, as well as how to recover from security breaches.

[Part 7](#) looks toward the future — both for those interested in potentially pursuing a cybersecurity-related career (or who have children or other relatives or friends considering doing so) as well as those interested in how emerging technologies are likely to impact their own personal cybersecurity.

[Part 8](#) gives several lists of ten items that you may want to keep as tip sheets.

Please keep in mind that while internalizing all the information in this book, and putting it into practice, will likely dramatically improve your cybersecurity posture, reading this book will no more make you an expert in cybersecurity than reading a book on the workings of the human heart will quickly transform you into a competent cardiologist.

Cybersecurity is a complex, rapidly changing field whose professionals spend years, if not decades, studying and working full-time to develop, sharpen, and maintain the skills and expertise that they utilize on a constant basis. As such, please do not consider the advice within this book as a substitute for hiring a professional for any situation that reasonably warrants the latter.

Also, please keep in mind that technical products change quite often, so any screenshots included within the book may not be identical to the screens that you observe when you perform similar actions to those described in the text. Remember: Cybersecurity threats are constantly evolving, as are the technologies and approaches utilized to combat them.

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, I make some assumptions about your experience with technology:

- » You have experience with using a keyboard and pointer, such as a mouse, on either a Mac or Windows PC and have access to one of those machines.

- » You know how to use an Internet browser, such as Firefox, Chrome, Edge, Opera, or Safari.
- » You know how to install applications on your computer.
- » You know how to perform a Google search.

Conventions Used in This Book

As you explore each part of this book, keep the following points in mind:

- » Words that are being defined appear in *italic*.
- » Code and URLs (web addresses) are shown in monofont.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the margin of this book are small images, known as icons. These icons mark important tidbits of information:



TIP The Tip icon identifies places where I offer additional tips for making this journey more interesting or clear. Tips cover some neat shortcuts that you may not have known about.



REMEMBER The Remember icon bookmarks important points that you'll want to keep in mind.



WARNING The Warning icon helps protect you from common errors and may even give you tips to undo your mistakes.

Beyond This Book

In addition to what you’re reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that covers important cybersecurity actions. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for *Cybersecurity For Dummies Cheat Sheet* in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

Cybersecurity For Dummies is designed in such a fashion that you don’t have to read the book in order or even read the entire book.

If you purchased this book because you suffered a cybersecurity breach of some sort, for example, you can skip to the [Part 5](#) without reading the prior material (although reading it afterwards may be wise, as it may help you prevent yourself from becoming the victim of another cyberattack).

Part 1

Getting Started with Cybersecurity

IN THIS PART ...

Discover what cybersecurity is and why defining it is more difficult than you might expect.

Find out why breaches seem to occur so often and why technology alone does not seem to stop them.

Explore various types of common cyberthreats and common cybersecurity tools.

Understand the who, how, and why of various types of attackers and threatening parties that aren't officially malicious.

Chapter 1

What Exactly Is Cybersecurity?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding that cybersecurity means different things for different entities
 - » Clarifying the difference between cybersecurity and information security
 - » Showing why cybersecurity is a constantly moving target
 - » Understanding the goals of cybersecurity
 - » Looking at the risks mitigated by cybersecurity
-

To improve your ability to keep yourself and your loved ones cybersecure, you need to understand what cybersecure means, what your goals should be vis-à-vis cybersecurity, and what exactly you're securing against.

While the answers to these questions may initially seem simple and straightforward, they aren't. As you can see in this chapter, these answers can vary dramatically between people, company divisions, organizations, and even within the same entity at different times.

Cybersecurity Means Different Things to Different Folks

While *cybersecurity* may sound like a simple enough term to define, in actuality, from a practical standpoint, it means quite different things to different people in different situations, leading to extremely varied relevant policies, procedures, and practices. An individual who wants to protect her social media accounts from hacker takeovers, for example, is

exceedingly unlikely to assume many of the approaches and technologies used by Pentagon workers to secure classified networks.

Typically, for example:

- » For **individuals**, *cybersecurity* means that their personal data is not accessible to anyone other than themselves and others whom they have so authorized, and that their computing devices work properly and are free from malware.
- » For **small business owners**, *cybersecurity* may include ensuring that credit card data is properly protected and that standards for data security are properly implemented at point-of-sale registers.
- » For **firms conducting online business**, *cybersecurity* may include protecting servers that untrusted outsiders regularly interact with.
- » For **shared service providers**, *cybersecurity* may entail protecting numerous data centers that house numerous servers that, in turn, host many virtual servers belonging to many different organizations.
- » For the **government**, *cybersecurity* may include establishing different classifications of data, each with its own set of related laws, policies, procedures, and technologies.



REMEMBER The bottom line is that while the word *cybersecurity* is easy to define, the practical expectations that enter peoples' minds when they hear the word vary quite a bit.

Technically speaking, *cybersecurity* is the subset of information security that addresses information and information systems that store and process data in electronic form, whereas *information security* encompasses the security of all forms of data (for example, securing a paper file and a filing cabinet).

That said, today, many people colloquially interchange the terms, often referring to aspects of *information security* that are technically not part of *cybersecurity* as being part of the latter. Such usage also results from

the blending of the two in many situations. Technically speaking, for example, if someone writes down a password on a piece of paper and leaves the paper on his desk where other people can see the password instead of placing the paper in a safe deposit box or safe, he has violated a principle of information security, not of cybersecurity, even though his actions may result in serious cybersecurity repercussions.

Cybersecurity Is a Constantly Moving Target

While the ultimate goal of cybersecurity may not change much over time, the policies, procedures, and technologies used to achieve it change dramatically as the years march on. Many approaches and technologies that were more than adequate to protect consumers' digital data in 1980, for example, are effectively worthless today, either because they're no longer practical to employ or because technological advances have rendered them obsolete or impotent.

While assembling a complete list of every advancement that the world has seen in recent decades and how such changes impact cybersecurity is effectively impossible, we can examine several key development areas and their impacts on the ever-evolving nature of cybersecurity: technological changes, economic model shifts, and outsourcing.

Technological changes

Technological changes tremendously impact cybersecurity. New risks come along with the new capabilities and conveniences that new offerings deliver. As the pace of technological advancement continues to increase, therefore, so does the pace of new cybersecurity risks. While the number of such risks created over the past few decades as the result of new offerings is astounding, the areas described in the following sections have yielded a disproportionate impact on cybersecurity.

Digital data

The last few decades have witnessed dramatic changes in the technologies that exist, as well as vis-à-vis who use such technologies, how they do so, and for what purposes. All these factors impact cybersecurity.

Consider, for example, that when many of the people alive today were children, controlling access to data in a business environment simply meant that the data owner placed a physical file containing the information into a locked cabinet and gave the key to only people he recognized as being authorized personnel and only when they requested the key during business hours. For additional security, he may have located the cabinet in an office that was locked after business hours and which itself was in a building that was also locked and alarmed.

Today, with the digital storage of information, however, simple filing and protection schemes have been replaced with complex technologies that must automatically authenticate users who seek the data from potentially any location at potentially any time, determine whether the users are authorized to access a particular element or set of data, and securely deliver the proper data — all while preventing any attacks against the system servicing data requests, any attacks against the data in transit, and any of the security controls protecting the both of them.

Furthermore, the transition from written communication to email and chat has moved tremendous amounts of sensitive information to Internet-connected servers. Likewise, society's move from film to digital photography and videography has increased the stakes for cybersecurity. Nearly every photograph and video taken today is stored electronically rather than on film and negatives — a situation that has enabled criminals situated anywhere to either steal people's images and leak them, or to hold people's valuable images ransom with ransomware. The fact that movies and television shows are now stored and transmitted electronically has likewise allowed pirates to copy them and offer them to the masses — sometimes via malware-infested websites.

The Internet

The most significant technological advancement when it comes to cybersecurity impact has been the arrival of the Internet era. Just a few

decades ago, it was unfathomable that hackers from across the globe could disrupt a business, manipulate an election, or steal a billion dollars. Today, no knowledgeable person would dismiss any such possibilities.

Prior to the Internet era, it was extremely difficult for the average hacker to financially profit by hacking. The arrival of online banking and commerce in the 1990s, however, meant that hackers could directly steal money or goods and services — which meant that not only could hackers quickly and easily monetize their efforts, but unethical people had strong incentives to enter the world of cybercrime.

Cryptocurrency

Compounding those incentives severalfold has been the arrival and proliferation of cryptocurrency over the past decade, along with innovation that has dramatically magnified the potential return-on-investment for criminals involved in cybercrime, simultaneously increasing their ability to earn money through cybercrime and improving their ability to hide while doing so. Criminals historically faced a challenge when receiving payments since the account from which they ultimately withdrew the money could often be tied to them. Cryptocurrency effectively eliminated such risks.

Mobile workforces and ubiquitous access

Not that many years ago, in the pre-Internet era, it was impossible for hackers to access corporate systems remotely because corporate networks were not connected to any public networks, and often had no dial-in capabilities. Executives on the road would often call their assistants to check messages and obtain necessary data while they were remote.

Connectivity to the Internet created some risk, but initially firewalls did not allow people outside the organization to initiate communications — so, short of firewall misconfigurations and/or bugs, most internal systems remained relatively isolated. The dawn of e-commerce and e-banking, of course, meant that certain production systems had to be

reachable and addressable from the outside world, but employee networks, for example, usually remained generally isolated.

The arrival of remote access technologies — starting with services like Outlook Web Access and pcAnywhere, and evolving to full VPN and VPN-like access — has totally changed the game.

Smart devices

Likewise, the arrival of smart devices and the *Internet of Things* (the universe of devices that are not traditional computers, but that are connected to the Internet) — whose proliferation and expansion are presently occurring at a startling rate — means that unhackable solid-state machines are being quickly replaced with devices that can potentially be controlled by hackers halfway around the world. The tremendous risks created by these devices are discussed more in [Chapter 17](#).

Big data

While big data is helping facilitate the creation of many cybersecurity technologies, it also creates opportunities for attackers. By correlating large amounts of information about the people working for an organization, for example, a criminal can more easily than before identify ideal methods for social engineering his/her way into the organization or locate and exploit possible vulnerabilities in the organization's infrastructure. As a result, various organizations have been effectively forced to implement all sorts of controls to prevent the leaking of information.

Entire books have been written on the impact of technological advancement. The main point to understand is that technological advancement has had a significant impact on cybersecurity, making security harder to deliver and raising the stakes when parties fail to properly protect their assets.

Social shifts

Various changes in the ways that humans behave and interact with one another have also had a major impact on cybersecurity. The Internet, for example, allows people from all over the world to interact in real-time.

Of course, this real-time interaction also enables criminals all over the world to commit crimes remotely. But it also allows citizens of repressive countries and free countries to communicate, creating opportunities for dispelling the perpetual propaganda utilized as excuses for the failure of totalitarianism to produce quality of lives on par with the democratic world. At the same time, it also delivers to the cyberwarriors of governments at odds with one another the ability to launch attacks via the same network.

The conversion of various information management systems from paper to computer, from isolated to Internet-connected, and from accessible-only-in-the-office to accessible from any smartphone or computer has dramatically changed the equation when it comes to what information hackers can steal. Furthermore, in many cases in which such conversions were, for security reasons, not initially done, the pressure emanating from the expectations of modern people that every piece of data be available to them at all times from anywhere has forced such conversions to occur, creating additional opportunities for criminals. To the delight of hackers, many organizations that, in the past, wisely protected sensitive information by keeping it offline have simply lost the ability to enjoy such protections if they want to stay in business.

Social media has also transformed the world of information — with people growing accustomed to sharing far more about themselves than ever before — often with audiences far larger than before as well. Today, due to the behavioral shift in this regard, it is trivial for evildoers from anywhere to assemble lists of a target's friends, professional colleagues, and relatives and to establish mechanisms for communication with all those people. Likewise, it is easier than ever before to find out what technologies a particular firm utilizes and for what purposes, discover people's travel schedules, and ascertain their opinions on various topics or their tastes in music and movies. The trend toward increased sharing continues. Most people remain blindly unaware of how much information about them lives on Internet-connected machines and how much other information about them can be extrapolated from the aforementioned data.

All these changes have translated into a scary reality: Due to societal shifts, an evildoer can easily launch a much larger, more sophisticated social engineering attack today than he or she could less than a decade ago.

Economic model shifts

Connecting nearly the entire world has allowed the Internet to facilitate other trends with tremendous cybersecurity ramifications. Operational models that were once unthinkable, such as that of an American company utilizing a call center in India and a software development shop in the Philippines, have become the mainstay of many corporations. These changes, however, create cybersecurity risks of all sorts.

The last 20 years have seen a tremendous growth in the outsourcing of various tasks from locations in which they're more expensive to carry out to regions in which they can be accomplished at much lower costs. The notion that a company in the United States could rely primarily on computer programmers in India or in the Philippines or that someone in New York seeking to have a logo made for her business could, shortly before going to bed, pay someone halfway around the globe \$5.50 to create it and have the logo in her email inbox immediately upon waking up the next morning, would have sounded like economic science-fiction a generation ago. Today, it's not only common, but also in many cases, it is the more common than any other method of achieving similar results.

Of course, many cybersecurity ramifications result. Data being transmitted needs to be protected from destruction, modification, and theft, and greater assurance is needed that back doors are not intentionally or inadvertently inserted into code. Greater protections are needed to prevent the theft of intellectual property and other forms of corporate espionage. Hackers no longer necessarily need to directly breach the organizations that they seek to hack; they merely need to compromise one or more of its providers, which may be far less careful with their information security and personnel practices than the ultimate target.

Political shifts

As with advances in technology, political shifts have had tremendous cybersecurity repercussions, some of which seem to permanent fixtures of news headlines. The combination of government power and mighty technology has often proven to be a costly one for citizens. If current trends continue, the impact on cybersecurity of various political shifts will only continue to grow in the foreseeable future.

Data collection

The proliferation of information online and the ability to attack machines all over the world have meant that governments can spy on citizens of their own countries and on the residents of other nations to an extent never before possible.

Furthermore, as more and more business, personal, and societal activities leave behind digital footprints, governments have easy access to a much greater amount of information about their potential intelligence targets than they could acquire even at much higher costs just a few years ago. Coupled with the relatively low cost of digital storage, advancing big data technologies, and the expected eventual impotence of many of today's encryption technologies, and governments have a strong incentive to collect and store as much data as they can about as many people as they can, in case it is of use at some later date. There is little doubt that some governments are already doing exactly that.

The long-term consequences of this phenomenon are, obviously, as of yet unknown, but one thing is clear: If businesses do not properly protect data, less-than-friendly nations are likely to obtain it and store it for use in either the short term, the long term, or both.

Election interference

A generation ago, one nation interfering in the elections of another was no trivial matter. Of course, such interference existed — it has occurred as long as there have been elections — but carrying out significant interference campaigns was expensive, resource-intensive, and risky.

To spread misinformation and other propaganda, materials had to be printed and physically distributed or recorded and transmitted via radio, meaning that individual campaigns were likely to reach only small

audiences. As such, the efficacy effects of such efforts were often quite low, and the risk of the party running the campaign being exposed was relatively high.

Manipulating voter registration databases to prevent legitimate voters from voting and/or to allow bogus voters to vote was extremely difficult and entailed tremendous risks; someone “working on the inside” would likely have had to be a traitor. In a country such as the United States, in which voter registration databases are decentralized and managed on a county level, recruiting sufficient saboteurs to truly impact a major election would likely have been impossible, and the odds of getting caught while attempting to do so were likely extremely high. Likewise, in the era of paper ballots and manual counting, for a foreign power to manipulate actual vote counts on any large scale was practically impossible.

Today, however, the game has changed. A government can easily spread misinformation through social media at an extremely low cost. If it crafts a well-thought-out campaign, it can rely on other people to spread the misinformation — something that people could not do en masse in the era of radio recordings and printed pamphlets. The ability to reach many more people, at a much lower cost than ever before, has meant that more parties are able to interfere in political campaigns and can do so with more efficacy than in the past. Similarly, governments can spread misinformation to stir up civil discontent within their adversaries nations and to spread hostility between ethnic and religious groups living in foreign lands.

With voter registration databases stored electronically and sometimes on servers that are at least indirectly connected to the Internet, records may be able to be added, modified, or deleted from halfway across the globe without detection. Even if such hacking is, in reality, impossible, the fact that many citizens today believe that it may be possible has led to an undermining of faith in elections, a phenomenon that we have witnessed in recent years and that has permeated throughout all levels of society. Even Jimmy Carter, a former president of the United States, has expressed that he believes that full investigation into the 2016

presidential election would show that Donald Trump lost the election — despite there being absolutely no evidence whatsoever to support such a conclusion, even after a thorough FBI investigation into the matter.

It is also not hard to imagine that if online voting were ever to arrive, the potential for vote manipulation by foreign governments, criminals, and even political parties within the nation voting — and for removing the ballot auditability that exists today — would grow astronomically.

Less than a decade ago, the United States did not consider election-related computer systems to be critical infrastructure and did not directly provide federal funding to secure such systems. Today, most people understand that the need for cybersecurity in such areas is of paramount importance, and the policies and behavior of just a few years ago seems nothing short of crazy.

Hacktivism

Likewise, the spread of democracy since the collapse of the Soviet Union a generation ago, coupled with Internet-based interaction between people all over the globe, has ushered in the era of hacktivism. People are aware of the goings-on in more places than in the past. Hackers angry about some government policy or activity in some location may target that government or the citizens of the country over which it rules from places far away.

Greater freedom

At the same time, repressed people are now more aware of the lifestyles of people in freer and more prosperous countries, a phenomenon that has both forced some governments to liberalize, and motivated others to implement cybersecurity-type controls to prevent using various Internet-based services.

Sanctions

Another political ramification of cybersecurity has been vis-à-vis international sanctions: Rogue states subject to such sanctions have been able to use cybercrime of various forms to circumvent the sanctions.

For example, North Korea is believed to have spread malware that mines cryptocurrency for the totalitarian state to computers all over the world, thereby allowing the country to circumvent sanctions by obtaining liquid money that can easily be spent anywhere.

In 2019, the failure by individuals to adequately secure their personal computers can directly impact political negotiations.

Creating a new balance of power

While the militaries of certain nations have long since grown more powerful than those of their adversaries — both the quality and quantity of weapons vary greatly between nations — when it comes to cybersecurity the balance of power is totally different.

While the quality of cyberweapons may vary between countries, the fact that launching cyberattacks costs little means that all militaries have an effectively unlimited supply of whatever weapons they use. In fact, in most cases, launching millions of cyberattacks costs little more than launching just one.

Also, unlike in the physical world in which any nation that bombed civilian homes in the territory of its adversary may face a severe reprisal, rogue governments regularly hack with impunity people in other countries. Victims often are totally unaware that they have been compromised, rarely report such incidents to law enforcement, and certainly don't know whom to blame.

Even when a victim realizes that a breach has occurred and even when technical experts point to the attackers as the culprits, the states behind such attacks often enjoy plausible deniability, preventing any government from publicly retaliating. In fact, the difficulty of ascertaining the source of cyberattacks coupled with the element of plausible deniability is a strong incentive for governments to use cyberattacks as a mechanism of proactively attacking an adversary, wreaking various forms of havoc without fear of significant reprisals.

Furthermore, the world of cybersecurity created a tremendous imbalance between attackers and defenders that works to the advantage of less powerful nations.

Governments that could never afford to launch huge barrages against an adversary in the physical world can easily do so in the world of cyber, where launching each attack costs next to nothing. As a result, attackers can afford to keep attacking until they succeed — and they need to breach systems only once to “succeed” — creating a tremendous problem for defenders who must shield their assets against every single attack. This imbalance has translated into a major advantage for attackers over defenders and has meant that even minor powers can successfully breach systems belonging to superpowers.

In fact, this imbalance contributes to the reason why cybersecurity breaches seem to occur so often, as many hackers simply keep attacking until they succeed. If an organization successfully defends against 10 million attacks but fails to stop the 10,000,001, it may suffer a severe breach and make the news. Reports of the breach likely won’t even mention the fact that it has a 99.999999 percent success rate in protecting its data and that it successfully stopped attackers one million times in a row. Likewise, if a business installed 99.999 percent of the patches that it should have but neglected to fix a single known vulnerability, it’s likely to suffer a breach due to the number of exploits available to criminals. Media outlets will point out the organization’s failure to properly patch, overlooking its near perfect record in that area.

As such, the era of cyber has also changed the balance of power between criminals and law enforcement.

Criminals know that the odds of being caught and successfully prosecuted for a cybercrime are dramatically smaller than those for most other crimes, and that repeated failed attempts to carry out a cybercrime are not a recipe for certain arrest as they are for most other crimes. They are also aware that law enforcement agencies lack the resources to pursue the vast majority of cyber criminals. Tracking down, taking into custody, and successfully prosecuting someone stealing data from halfway across the world via numerous hops in many countries and a network of computers commandeered from law-abiding folks, for example, requires gathering and dedicating significantly more resources

than does catching a thief who was recorded on camera while holding up in a store in a local police precinct.

With the low cost of launching repeated attacks, the odds of eventual success in their favor, the odds of getting caught and punished minuscule, and the potential rewards growing with increased digitalization, criminals know that cybercrime pays, underscoring the reason that you need to protect yourself.

Looking at the Risks That Cybersecurity Mitigates

People sometimes explain the reason that cybersecurity is important as being “because it prevent hackers from breaking into systems and stealing data and money.” But such a description dramatically understates the role that cybersecurity plays in keeping the modern home, business, or even world running.

In fact, the role of cybersecurity can be looked at from a variety of different vantage points, with each presenting a different set of goals. Of course the following lists aren’t complete, but they should provide food for thought and underscore the importance of understanding how to cybersecure yourself and your loved ones.

The goal of cybersecurity: The CIA triad

Cybersecurity professionals often explain that the goal of cybersecurity is to ensure the Confidentiality, Integrity, and Availability (CIA) of data, sometimes referred to as the CIA Triad, with the pun lovingly intended:

- » **Confidentiality** refers to ensuring that information isn’t disclosed or in any other way made available to unauthorized entities (including people, organizations, or computer processes).



WARNING Don't confuse confidentiality with privacy: Confidentiality is a subset of the realm of privacy. It deals specifically with protecting data from unauthorized viewers, whereas privacy in general encompasses much more.

Hackers that steal data undermine confidentiality.

- » **Integrity** refers to ensuring that data is both accurate and complete. *Accurate* means, for example, that the data is never modified in any way by any unauthorized party or by a technical glitch. *Complete* refers to, for example, data that has had no portion of itself removed by any unauthorized party or technical glitch. Integrity also includes ensuring *nonrepudiation*, meaning that data is created and handled in such a fashion that nobody can reasonably argue that the data is not authentic or is inaccurate. Cyberattacks that intercept data and modify it before relaying it to its destination — sometimes known as *man-in-the-middle attacks* — undermine integrity.
- » **Availability** refers to ensuring that information, the systems used to store and process it, the communication mechanisms used to access and relay it, and all associated security controls function correctly to meet some specific benchmark (for example, 99.99 percent uptime). People outside of the cybersecurity field sometimes think of availability as a secondary aspect of information security after confidentiality and integrity. In fact, ensuring availability is an integral part of cybersecurity. Doing so, though, is sometimes more difficult than ensuring confidentiality or integrity. One reason that this is true is that maintaining availability often requires involving many more noncybersecurity professionals, leading to a “too many cooks in the kitchen” type challenge, especially in larger organizations. Distributed denial-of-service attacks attempt to undermine availability. Also, consider that attacks often use large numbers of stolen computer power and bandwidth to launch DDoS attacks, but responders who seek to ensure availability can only

leverage the relatively small amount of resources that they can afford.

From a human perspective

The risks that cybersecurity addresses can also be thought of in terms better reflecting the human experience:

- » **Privacy risks:** Risks emanating from the potential loss of adequate control over, or misuse of, personal or other confidential information.
- » **Financial risks:** Risks of financial losses due to hacking. Financial losses can include both those that are direct — for example, the theft of money from someone's bank account by a hacker who hacked into the account — and those that are indirect, such as the loss of customers who no longer trust a small business after the latter suffers a security breach.
- » **Professional risks:** Risks to one's professional career that stem from breaches. Obviously, cybersecurity professionals are at risk for career damage if a breach occurs under their watch and is determined to have happened due to negligence, but other types of professionals can suffer career harm due to a breach as well. C-level executives can be fired, Board members can be sued, and so on. Professional damage can also occur if hackers release private communications or data that shows someone in a bad light — for example, records that a person was disciplined for some inappropriate action, sent an email containing objectionable material, and so on.
- » **Business risks:** Risks to a business similar to the professional risks to an individual. Internal documents leaked after breach of Sony Pictures painted various the firm in a negative light vis-à-vis some of its compensation practices.
- » **Personal risks:** Many people store private information on their electronic devices, from explicit photos to records of participation in activities that may not be deemed respectable by members of their respective social circles. Such data can sometimes cause significant

harm to personal relationships if it leaks. Likewise, stolen personal data can help criminals steal people's identities, which can result in all sorts of personal problems.

Chapter 2

Getting to Know Common Cyberattacks

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring attacks that can inflict damage
 - » Discovering the difference between impersonation, data interception, and data theft
 - » Looking at the various types of malware, poisoning, and malvertising
 - » Understanding how cyberattackers exploit the challenges of maintaining complex technology infrastructures
 - » Finding out about forms of advanced cyberattacks
-

Many different types of cyberattacks exist — so many that I could write an entire series of books about them. In this book, however, I do not cover all types of threats in detail because the reality is, that you're likely reading this book to learn about how to keep yourself cybersecure, not to learn about matters that have no impact on you, such as forms of attacks that are normally directed at espionage agencies, industrial equipment, or military armaments.

In this chapter, you find out about the different types of problems that cyberattackers can create through the use of attacks that commonly impact individuals and small businesses.

Attacks That Inflict Damage

Attackers launch some forms of cyberattacks with the intent to inflict damage to victims. The threat posed by such attacks is not that a

criminal will directly steal your money or data, but that the attackers will inflict harm to you in some other specific manner — a manner that may ultimately translate into financial, military, political, or other benefit to the attacker and (potentially) damage of some sort to the victim.

Types of attacks that inflict damage include

- » Denial-of-service (DoS) attacks
- » Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks
- » Botnets and zombies
- » Data destruction attacks

Denial-of-service (DoS) attacks

A *denial-of-service attack* is one in which an attacker intentionally attempts to paralyze a computer or computer network by flooding it with large amounts of requests or data, which overload the target and make it incapable of responding properly to legitimate requests.

In many cases, the requests sent by the attacker are each, on their own, legitimate — for example, a normal request to load a web page.

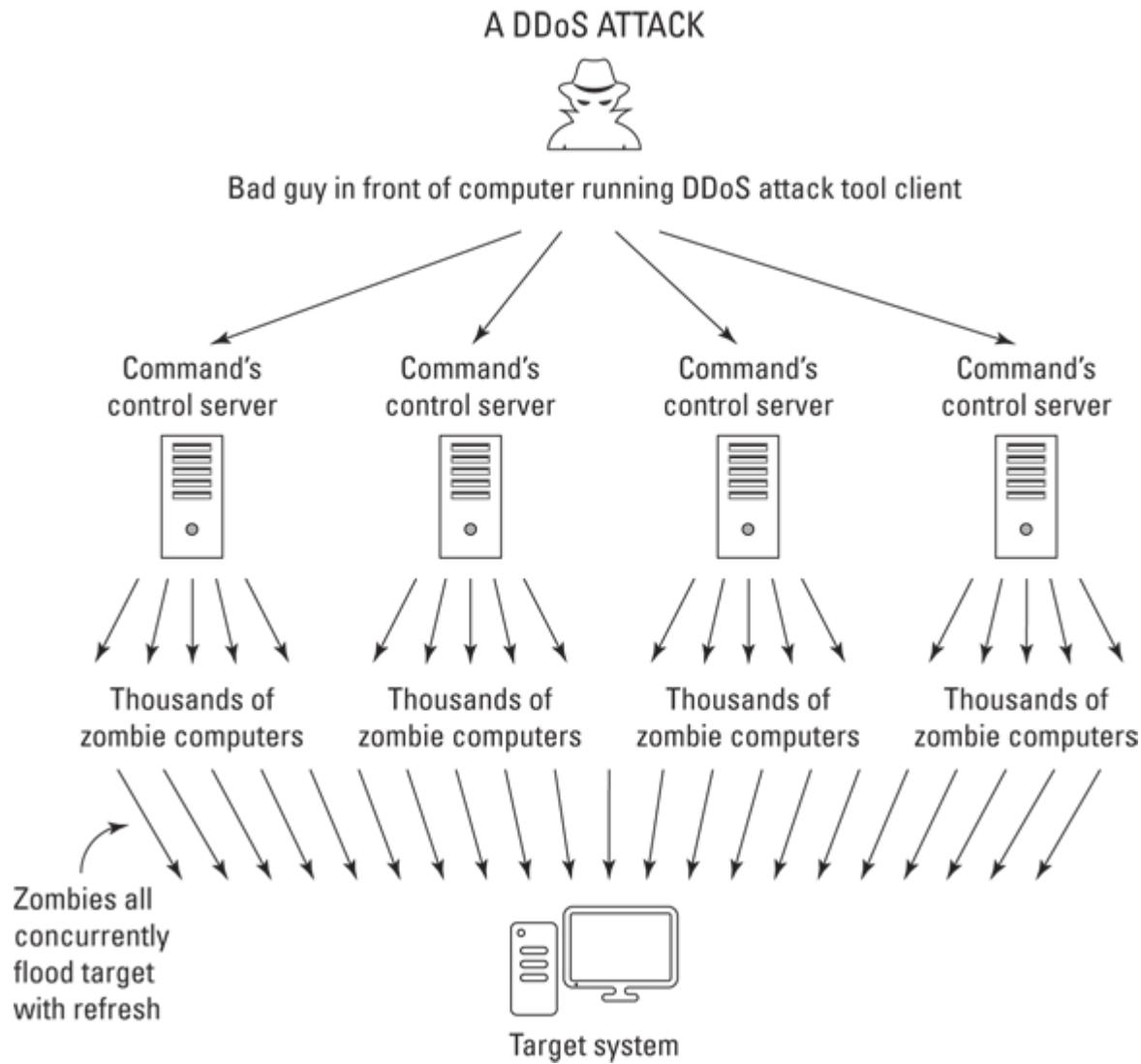
In other cases, the requests aren't normal requests. Instead, they leverage knowledge of various protocols to send requests that optimize, or even magnify, the effect of the attack.

In any case, denial-of-service attacks work by overwhelming computer systems' Central Processing Units (CPU)s and/or memory, utilizing all the available network communications bandwidth, and/or exhausting networking infrastructure resources such as routers.

Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks

A *Distributed DoS attack* is a DoS attack in which many individual computers or other connected devices across disparate regions simultaneously flood the target with requests. In recent years, nearly all major denial-of-service attacks have been distributed in nature — and some have involved the use of Internet-connected cameras and other

devices as attack vehicles, rather than classic computers. [Figure 2-1](#) illustrates the anatomy of a simple DDoS attack.



[FIGURE 2-1:](#) A DDoS attack.

The goal of a DDoS attack is to knock the victim offline, and the motivation for doing so varies.

Sometimes the goal is financial: Imagine, for example, the damage that may result to an online retailer's business if an unscrupulous competitor knocked the former's site offline during Black Friday weekend. Imagine a crook who shorts the stock of a major retailer of toys right before launching a DDoS attack against the retailer two weeks before Christmas.

DDoS attacks remain a serious and growing threat. Criminal enterprises even offer DDoS for hire services, which are advertised on the dark web as offering, for a fee, to “take your competitor’s websites offline in a cost-effective manner.”

In some cases, DDoS launchers may have political, rather than financial, motives. For example, a corrupt politician may seek to have his or her opponent’s website taken down during an election season, thereby reducing the competitor’s ability to spread messages and receive online campaign contributions. Hacktivists may also launch DDoS attacks in order to take down sites in the name of “justice” — for example, targeting law enforcement sites after an unarmed person is killed during an altercation with police.

In fact, according to a 2017 study by Kaspersky Lab and B2B International, almost half of companies worldwide that experienced a DDoS attack suspect that their competitors may have been involved.

DDoS attacks can impact individuals in three significant ways:

- » **A DDoS attack on a local network can significantly slow down all Internet access from that network.** Sometimes these attacks make connectivity so slow that connections to sites fail due to *session timeout* settings, meaning that the systems terminate the connections after seeing requests take longer to elicit responses than some maximum permissible threshold.
- » **A DDoS attack can render inaccessible a site that a person plans on using.** On October 21, 2016, for example, many users were unable to reach several high-profile sites, including Twitter, PayPal, CNN, HBO Now, The Guardian, and dozens of other popular sites, due to a massive DDoS attack launched against a third party providing various technical services for these sites and many more.



TIP

The possibility of DDoS attacks is one of the reasons that you should never wait until the last minute to perform an online banking transaction — the site that you need to utilize may be inaccessible for a number of reasons, one of which is an ongoing DDoS attack.

- » **A DDoS attack can lead users to obtain information from one site instead of another.** By making one site unavailable, Internet users looking for specific information are likely to obtain it from another site — a phenomenon that allows attackers to either spread misinformation or prevent people from hearing certain information or vantage points on important issues. As such, DDoS attacks can be used as an effective mechanism — at least over the short term — for censoring opposing points of view.

Botnets and zombies

Often, DDoS attacks use what are known as *botnets*. Botnets are a collection of compromised computers that belong to other parties, but that a hacker remotely controls and uses to perform tasks without the legitimate owners' knowledge.

Criminals who successfully infect one million computers with malware can, for example, potentially use those machines, known as *zombies*, to simultaneously make many requests from a single server or server farm in an attempt to overload the target with traffic.

Data destruction attacks

Sometimes attackers want to do more than take a party temporarily offline by overwhelming it with requests — they may want to damage the victim by destroying or corrupting the target's information and/or information systems. A criminal may seek to destroy a user's data through a *data destruction attack* — for example, if the user refuses to pay a ransomware ransom that the crook demands.

Of course, all the reasons for launching DDoS attacks (see preceding section) are also reasons that a hacker may attempt to destroy someone's data as well.

Wiper attacks are advanced data destruction attacks in which a criminal uses malware to wipe the data on a victim's hard drive or SSD, in such a fashion that the data is difficult or impossible to recover.

To put it simply, unless the victim has backups, someone whose computer is wiped by a wiper is likely to lose access to all the data and software that was previously stored on the attacked device.

Impersonation

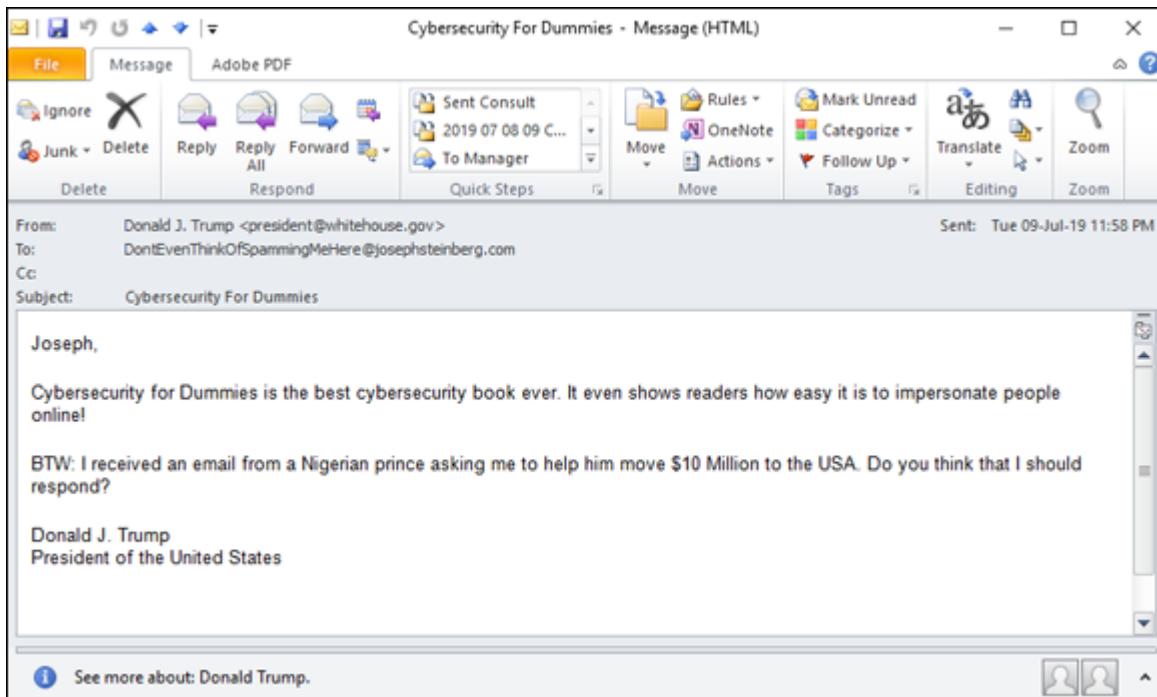
One of the great dangers that the Internet creates is the ease with which mischievous parties can impersonate others. Prior to the Internet era, for example, criminals could not easily impersonate a bank or a store and convince people to hand over their money in exchange for some promised rate of interest or goods. Physically mailed letters and later telephone calls became the tools of scammers, but none of those earlier communication techniques ever came close to the power of the Internet to aid criminals attempting to impersonate law-abiding parties.

Creating a website that mimics the website of a bank, store, or government agency is quite simple and can sometimes be done within minutes. Criminals can find a near-endless supply of domain names that are close enough to those of legitimate parties to trick some folks into believing that a site that they are seeing is the real deal when it's not, giving crooks the typical first ingredient in the recipe for online impersonation.



WARNING Sending an email that appears to have come from someone else is simple and allows criminals to perpetrate all sorts of crimes online. I myself demonstrated over 20 years ago how I could defeat various defenses and send an email that was delivered to recipients

on a secure system — the message appeared to readers to have been sent from god@heaven.sky. [Figure 2-2](#) shows another email message that may have been faked.



Spear phishing refers to phishing attacks that are designed and sent to target a specific person, business, or organization. If a criminal seeks to obtain credentials into a specific company's email system, for example, he or she may send emails crafted specifically for particular targeted individuals within the organization. Often, criminals who spear phish research their targets online and leverage overshared information on social media in order to craft especially legitimate-sounding emails.

For example, the following type of email is typically a lot more convincing than "Please login to the mail server and reset your password.":

"Hi, I am going to be getting on my flight in ten minutes. Can you please login to the Exchange server and check when my meeting is? For some reason, I cannot get in. You can try to call me by phone first for security reasons, but, if you miss me, just go ahead, check the information, and email it to me — as you know that I am getting on a flight that is about to take off."

CEO fraud

CEO fraud is similar to spear phishing (see preceding section) in that it involves a criminal impersonating the CEO or other senior executive of a particular business, but the instructions provided by "the CEO" may be to take an action directly, not to log in to a system, and the goal may not be to capture usernames and passwords or the like.

The crook, for example, may send an email to the firm's CFO instructing her or him to issue a wire payment to a particular new vendor or to send all the organization's W2 forms for the year to a particular email address belonging to the firm's accountant. See [Figure 2-3.](#)

CEO fraud often nets significant returns for criminals and makes employees who fall for the scams appear incompetent. As a result, people who fall prey to such scams are often fired from their jobs.

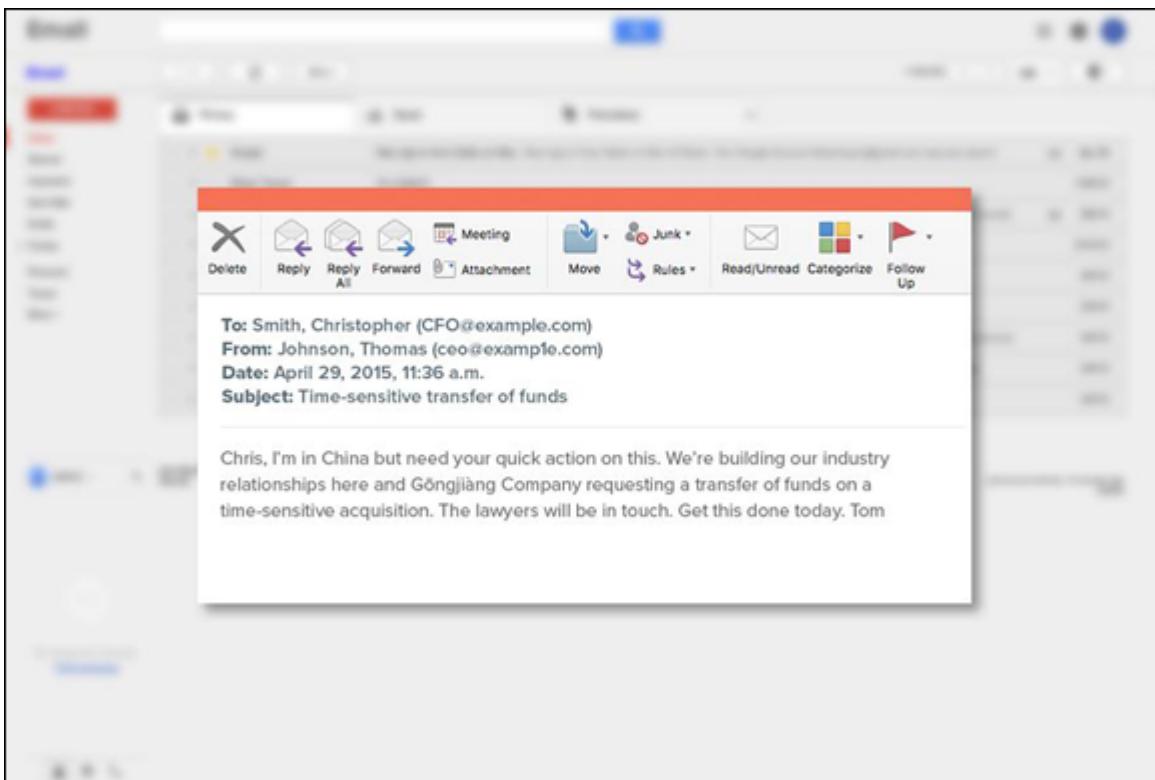


FIGURE 2-3: A fraudulent email.

Smishing

Smishing refers to cases of phishing in which the attackers deliver their messages via text messages (SMS) rather than email. The goal may be to capture usernames and passwords or to trick the user into installing malware.

Vishing

Vishing, or voice-based phishing, is phishing via POTS — that stands for “plain old telephone service.” Yes, criminals use old, time-tested methods for scamming people. Today, most such calls are transmitted by Voice Over IP systems, but, in the end, the scammers are calling people on regular telephones much the same way that scammers have been doing for decades.

Whaling

Whaling refers to spear phishing that targets high-profile business executives or government officials. For more on spear phishing, see the

section earlier in this chapter.

Tampering

Sometimes attackers don't want to disrupt an organization's normal activities, but instead seek to exploit those activities for financial gain. Often, crooks achieve such objectives by manipulating data in transit or as it resides on systems of their targets in a process known as *tampering*.

In a basic case of tampering with data in transit, for example, imagine that a user of online banking has instructed his bank to wire money to a particular account, but somehow a criminal intercepted the request and changed the relevant routing and account number to his own.

A criminal may also hack into a system and manipulate information for similar purposes. Using the previous example, imagine if a criminal changed the payment address associated with a particular payee so that when the Accounts Payable department makes an online payment, the funds are sent to the wrong destination (well, at least it is wrong in the eyes of the payer).

Interception

Interception occurs when attackers capture information in transit between computers. If the data isn't properly encrypted, the party intercepting it may be able to misuse it.

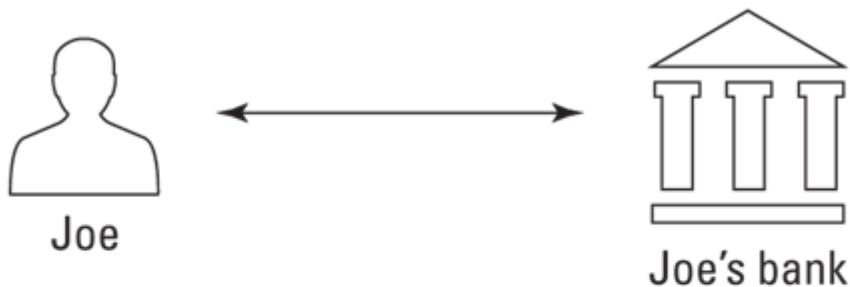
One special type of interception is known as a *man-in-the-middle attack*. In this type of an attack, the interceptor proxies the data between the sender and recipient in an attempt to disguise the fact that the data is being intercepted. *Proxying* in such a case refers to the man-in-the-middle intercepting requests and then transmitting them (either in modified form or unmodified) to their original intended destinations and then receiving the responses from those destination and transmitting them (in modified form or unmodified) back to the sender. By employing proxying, the man-in-the-middle makes it difficult for the sender to know that his communications are being intercepted because

when he communicates with a server, he receives the responses that he expects.

For example, a criminal may set up a bogus bank site (see the earlier “[Phishing](#)” section) and relay any information that anyone enters on the bogus site to the actual bank site so that the criminal can respond with the same information that the legitimate bank would have sent. Proxying of this sort not only helps the criminal avoid detection — a user who provides the crook with his or her password and then performs his or her normal online banking tasks may have no idea that anything abnormal occurred during the online banking session — but, also helps the criminal ensure that he or she captures the right password. If a user enters an incorrect password, the criminal will know to prompt for the correct one.

[Figure 2-4](#) shows the anatomy of a man-in-the-middle intercepting and relaying communications.

Man-in-the-middle attack
Joe wants to communicate with his bank



But Bob's evil server is acting as a man-in-the-middle

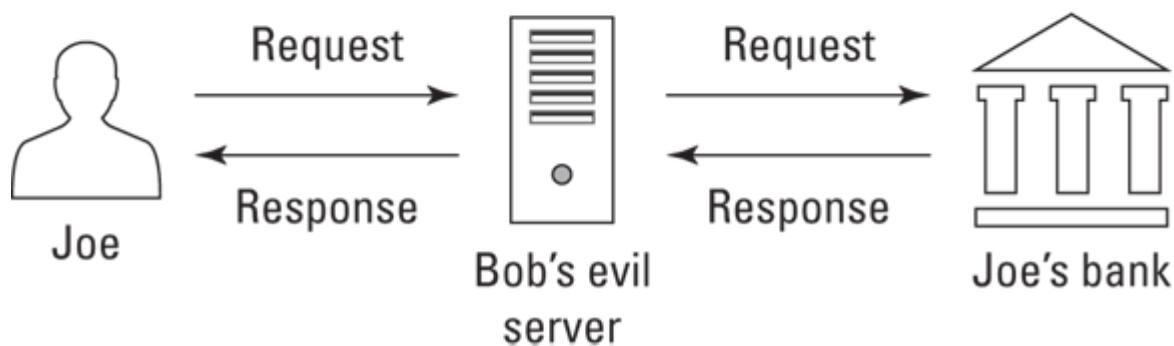


FIGURE 2-4: A man-in-the-middle interception.

Data Theft

Many cyberattacks involve stealing the victim's data. An attacker may want to steal data belonging to individuals, businesses, or a government agency for one or more of many possible reasons.

People, businesses, nonprofits, and governments are all vulnerable to data theft.

Personal data theft

Criminals often try to steal people's data in the hope of finding items that they can monetize, including:

- » Data that can be used for identity theft or sold to identity thieves

- » Compromising photos or health-related data that may be sellable or used as part of blackmail schemes
- » Information that is stolen and then erased from the user's machine that can be ransomed to the user
- » Password lists that can be used for breaching other systems
- » Confidential information about work-related matters that may be used to make illegal stock trades based on insider information
- » Information about upcoming travel plans that may be used to plan robberies of the victim's home

Business data theft

Criminals can use data stolen from businesses for a number of nefarious purposes:

- » **Making stock trades:** Having advance knowledge of how a quarter is going to turn out gives a criminal insider information on which he or she can illegally trade stocks or options and potentially make a significant profit.
- » **Selling data to unscrupulous competitors:** Criminals who steal sales pipeline information, documents containing details of future products, or other sensitive information can sell that data to unscrupulous competitors or to unscrupulous employees working at competitors whose management may never find out how such employees suddenly improved their performance.
- » **Leaking data to the media:** Sensitive data can embarrass the victim and cause its stock to decline (perhaps after selling short some shares).
- » **Leaking data covered by privacy regulations:** The victim may be potentially fined.
- » **Recruiting employees:** By recruiting employees or selling the information to other firms looking to hire employees with similar skills or with knowledge of competitions' systems, criminals who steal emails and discover communication between employees that

indicates that one or more employees are unhappy in their current positions can sell that information to parties looking to hire.

» **Stealing and using intellectual property:** Parties that steal the source code for computer software may be able to avoid paying licensing fees to the software's rightful owner. Parties that steal design documents created by others after extensive research and development can easily save millions of dollars — and, sometimes, even billions of dollars — in research and development costs. For more on the effects of this type of theft, see the nearby sidebar "[How a cyberbreach cost one company \\$1 billion without 1 cent being stolen.](#)"

HOW A CYBERBREACH COST ONE COMPANY \$1 BILLION WITHOUT 1 CENT BEING STOLEN

Theft of intellectual property (IP), such as confidential design documents and computer source code, is an extremely serious matter and a growing area of cybercrime.

For example, in 2007, the Massachusetts-based technology firm American Superconductor, which manufactured software to control wind turbines, partnered with Sinovel, a Chinese firm that manufactured wind turbines, to start selling the turbines in China.

In 2011, Sinovel suddenly refused to pay American Superconductor \$70 million that it owed the firm and began to sell turbines with its own software. An investigation revealed that Sinovel had illegally obtained the IP of American Superconductor by bribing a single employee at the American firm to help it steal the source code.

American Superconductor nearly went bankrupt as a result, declined in value by more than \$1 billion, and had to let go of 700 employees, nearly half of its workforce.

Malware

Malware, or malicious software, is an all-encompassing term for software that intentionally inflicts damage on its users who typically have no idea that they are running it.

Malware includes computer viruses, worms, Trojans, ransomware, scareware, spyware, cryptocurrency miners, adware, and other programs intended to exploit computer resources for nefarious purposes.

Viruses

Computer viruses are instances of malware that, when executed, replicate by inserting their own code into computer systems. Typically, the insertion is in data files (for example, as rogue macros within a Word document), the special portion of hard drives or solid state drives that contain the code and data used to boot a computer or disk (also known as *boot sectors*), or other computer programs.

Like biological viruses, computer viruses can't spread without having hosts to infect. Some computer viruses significantly impact the performance of their hosts, while others are, at least at times, hardly noticeable.

While computer viruses still inflict tremendous damage worldwide, the majority of serious malware threats today arrive in the form of worms and Trojans.

Worms

Computer worms are stand-alone pieces of malware that replicate themselves without the need for hosts in order to spread. Worms often propagate over connections by exploiting security vulnerabilities on target computers and networks.

Because they normally consume network bandwidth, worms can inflict harm even without modifying systems or stealing data. They can slow down network connections — and few people, if any, like to see their internal and Internet connections slow down.

Trojans

Trojans (appropriately named after the historical Trojan horse) is malware that is either disguised as nonmalicious software or hidden within a legitimate, nonmalicious application or piece of digital data.

Trojans are most often spread by some form of social engineering — for example, by tricking people into clicking on a link, installing an app, or running some email attachment. Unlike viruses and worms, Trojans typically don't self-propagate using technology — instead, they rely on the effort (or more accurately, the mistakes) of humans.

Ransomware

Ransomware is malware that demands that a ransom be paid to some criminal in exchange for the infected party not suffering some harm.

Ransomware often encrypts user files and threatens to delete the encryption key if a ransom isn't paid within some relatively short period of time, but other forms of ransomware involve a criminal actually stealing user data and threatening to publish it online if a ransom is not paid.

Some ransomware actually steals the files from users' computers, rather than simply encrypting data, so as to ensure that the user has no possible way to recover his or her data (for example, using an anti-ransomware utility) without paying the ransom.

Ransomware is most often delivered to victims as a Trojan or a virus, but has also been successfully spread by criminals who packaged it in a worm. In recent years sophisticated criminals have even crafted targeted ransomware campaigns that leverage knowledge about what data is most valuable to a particular target and how much that target can afford to pay in ransoms.

[Figure 2-5](#) shows the ransom demand screen of WannaCry — a flavor of ransomware that inflicted at least hundreds of millions of dollars in damage (if not billions), after initially spreading in May 2017. Many security experts believe that the North Korean government or others working for it created WannaCry, which, within four days, infected hundreds of thousands of computers in about 150 countries.



FIGURE 2-5: Ransomware demanding ransom.

Scareware

Scareware is malware that scares people into taking some action. One common example is malware that scares people into buying security software. A message appears on a device that the device is infected with some virus that only a particular security package can remove, with a link to purchase that “security software.”

Spyware

Spyware is software that surreptitiously, and without permission, collects information from a device. Spyware may capture a user’s keystrokes (in which case it is called a *keylogger*), video from a video camera, audio from a microphone, screen images, and so on.

It is important to understand the difference between spyware and invasive programs. Some technologies that may technically be considered spyware if users had not been told that they were being

tracked online are in use by legitimate businesses; they may be invasive, but they are not malware. These types of *nonspyware that also spies* includes beacons that check whether a user loaded a particular web page and tracking cookies installed by websites or apps. Some experts have argued that any software that tracks a smartphone's location while the app is not being actively used by the device's user also falls into the category of *nonspyware that also spies* — a definition that would include popular apps, such as Uber.

Cryptocurrency miners

Cryptocurrency miners are malware that, without any permission from devices' owners, commandeers infected devices' brainpower (its CPU cycles) to generate new units of a particular cryptocurrency (which the malware gives to the criminals operating the malware) by completing complex math problems that require significant processing power to solve.

The proliferation of cryptocurrency miners exploded in 2017 with the rise of cryptocurrency values. Even after price levels subsequently dropped, the miners are still ubiquitous as once criminals have invested in creating the miners, there is little cost in continuing to deploy them. Not surprisingly, as cryptocurrency prices began to rise again in 2019, new strains of cryptominers began to appear as well — some of which specifically target Android smartphones.

Many low-end cybercriminals favor using cryptominers. Even if each miner, on its own, pays the attacker very little, miners are easy to obtain and directly monetize cyberattacks without the need for extra steps (such as collecting a ransom) or the need for sophisticated command and control systems.

Adware

Adware is software that generates revenue for the party operating it by displaying online advertisements on a device. Adware may be malware — that is, installed and run without the permission of a device's owner — or it may be a legitimate component of software (for example,

installed knowingly by users as part of some free, ad-supported package).



TIP Some security professionals refer to the former as *adware malware*, and the latter as adware. Because no consensus exists, it's best to clarify which of the two is being discussed when you hear someone mention just the generic term adware.

Blended malware

Blended malware is malware that utilizes multiple types of malware technology as part of an attack — for example, combining features of Trojans, worms, and viruses.

Blended malware can be quite sophisticated and often stems from skilled attackers.

Zero day malware

Zero day malware is any malware that exploits a vulnerability not previously known to the public or to the vendor of the technology containing the vulnerability, and is, as such, often extremely potent.

Regularly creating zero day malware requires significant resource and development. It's quite expensive and is often crafted by the cyber armies of nation states rather than by other hackers.

Commercial purveyors of zero day malware have been known to charge over \$1 million for a single exploit.

Poisoned Web Service Attacks

Many different types of attacks leverage vulnerabilities in servers, and new weaknesses are constantly discovered, which is why cybersecurity professionals have full-time jobs keeping servers safe. Entire books — or even several series of books — can be written on such a topic, which is, obviously, beyond the scope of this work.

That said, it is important for you to understand the basic concepts of server-based attacks because some such attacks can directly impact you.

One such form of attack is a *poisoned web service attack*, or a *poisoned web page attack*. In this type of attack, an attacker hacks into a web server and inserts code onto it that causes it to attack users when they access a page or set of pages that the server is serving.

For example, a hacker may compromise the web server serving www.abc123.com and modify the home page that is served to users accessing the site so that the home page contains malware.

But, a hacker does not even need to necessarily breach a system in order to poison web pages!

If a site that allows users to comment on posts isn't properly secured, for example, it may allow a user to add the text of various commands within a comment — commands that, if crafted properly, may be executed by users' browsers any time they load the page that displays the comment. A criminal can insert a command to run a script on the criminal's website, which can receive the authentication credentials of the user to the original site because it is called within the context of one of that site's web pages. Such an attack is known as *cross site scripting*, and it continues to be a problem even after over a decade of being addressed.

Network Infrastructure Poisoning

As with web servers, many different types of attacks leverage vulnerabilities in network infrastructure, and new weaknesses are constantly discovered. The vast majority of this topic is beyond the scope of this book. That said, as is the case with poisoned web servers, you need to understand the basic concepts of server-based attacks because some such attacks can directly impact you.

For example, criminals may exploit various weaknesses in order to add corrupt domain name system (DNS) data into a DNS server.

DNS is the directory of the Internet that translates human readable addresses into their numeric, computer-readable equivalents (IP

addresses). For example, if you type <https://JosephSteinberg.com> into your web browser, DNS directs your connection to an address of 104.18.45.53.

By inserting incorrect information into DNS tables, a criminal can cause a DNS server to return an incorrect IP address to a user's computer. Such an attack can easily result in a user's traffic being diverted to a computer of the attacker's choice instead of the user's intended destination. If the criminal sets up a phony bank site on the server to which traffic is being diverted, for example, and impersonates on that server a bank that the user was trying to reach, even a user who enters the bank URL into his or her browser (as opposed to just clicking on a link) may fall prey after being diverted to the bogus site. (This type of attack is known as *DNS poisoning* or *pharming*.)

Network infrastructure attacks take many forms. Some seek to route people to the wrong destinations. Others seek to capture data, while others seek to effectuate denial-of-service conditions. The main point to understand is that the piping of the Internet is quite complex was not initially designed with security in mind, and is vulnerable to many forms of misuse.

Malvertising

Malvertising is an abbreviation of the words malicious advertising and refers to the use of online advertising as a vehicle to spread malware or to launch some other form of a cyberattack.

Because many websites display ads that are served and managed by third-party networks and that contain links to various other third parties, online advertisements are a great vehicle for attackers. Even companies that adequately secure their websites may not take proper precautions to ensure that they do not deliver problematic advertisements created by, and managed by, someone else.

As such, malvertising sometimes allows criminals to insert their content into reputable and high-profile websites with large numbers of visitors (something that would be difficult for crooks to achieve otherwise),

many of whom may be security conscious and who would not have been exposed to the criminal's content had it been posted on a less reputable site.

Furthermore, because websites often earn money for their owners based on the number of people who click on various ads, website owners generally place ads on their sites in a manner that will attract users to the ads.

As such, malvertising allows criminals to reach large audiences via a trusted site without having to hack anything.

Some malvertising requires users to click on the ads in order to become infected with malware; others do not require any user participation — users' devices are infected the moment that the ad displays.

Drive-by downloads

Drive-by downloads is somewhat of a euphemism that refers to software that a user downloads without understanding what he or she is doing. A drive-by download may occur, for example, if a user downloads malware by going to a poisoned website that automatically sends the malware to the user's device when he or she opens the site.

Drive-by downloads also include cases in which a user knows that he or she is downloading software, but is not aware of the full consequences of doing so. For example, if a user is presented with a web page that says that a security vulnerability is present on his or her computer and that tells the user to click on a button that says Download to install a security patch, the user has provided authorization for the (malicious) download — but only because he or she was tricked into believing that the nature of the download was far different than it truly is.

Stealing passwords

Criminals can steal passwords many different ways. Two common methods include

- » **Thefts of password databases:** If a criminal steals a password database from an online store, anyone whose password appears in

the database is at risk of having his or her password compromised. (If the store properly encrypted its passwords, it may take time for the criminal to perform what is known as a *hash attack*, but nonetheless, passwords — especially those that are likely to be tested early on — may still be at risk. To date, stealing passwords is the most common way that passwords are undermined.

» **Social engineering attacks:** *Social engineering attacks* are attacks in which a criminal tricks someone into doing something that he would not have done had he realized that the person making the request was tricking him in some way. One example of stealing a password via social engineering is when a criminal pretends to be a member of the tech support department of his target's employer and tells his target that the target must reset a particular password to a particular value to have the associated account tested as is needed after the recovery from some breach, and the target obeys. (For more information, see the earlier section on phishing.)

» **Credential attacks:** Credential attacks are attacks that seek to gain entry into a system by entering, without authorization, a valid username and password combination (or other authentication information as needed). These attacks fall into four primary categories:

- *Brute force:* Criminals use automated tools that try all possible passwords until they hit the correct one.
- *Dictionary attacks:* Criminals use automated tools to feed every word in the dictionary to a site until they hit the correct one.
- *Calculated attacks:* Criminals leverage information about a target to guess his or her password. Criminals may, for example, try someone's mother's maiden name because they can easily garner it for many people by looking at the most common last names of their Facebook friends or from posts on social media. (A Facebook post of “Happy Mother’s Day to my wonderful mother!” that includes a user tag to a woman

with a different last name than the user himself/herself is a good giveaway.)

- *Blended attacks:* Some attacks leverage a mix of the preceding techniques — for example, utilizing a list of common last names, or performing a brute force attack technology that dramatically improves its efficiency by leveraging knowledge about how users often form passwords.
- » **Malware:** If crooks manage to get malware onto someone's device, it may capture passwords. (For more details, see the section on malware, earlier in this chapter.)
- » **Network sniffing:** If someone transmits his or her password to a site without proper encryption while using a public Wi-Fi network, a criminal using the same network may be able to see that password in transit — as can potentially other criminals connected to networks along the path from the user to the site in question.
- » **Credential stuffing:** In credential stuffing, someone attempts to log in to one site using usernames and passwords combinations stolen from another site.



REMEMBER You can utilize passwords and a password strategy that can help defeat all these techniques — see [Chapter 7](#).

Exploiting Maintenance Difficulties

Maintaining computer systems is no trivial matter. Software vendors often release updates, many of which may impact other programs running on a machine. Yet, some patches are absolutely critical to be installed in a timely fashion because they fix bugs in software — bugs that may introduce exploitable security vulnerabilities. The conflict between security and following proper maintenance procedures is a never-ending battle — and security doesn't often win.

As a result, the vast majority of computers aren't kept up to date. Even people who do enable automatic updates on their devices may not be up to date — both because checks for updates are done periodically, not every second of every day, and because not all software offers automatic updating. Furthermore, sometimes updates to one piece of software introduce vulnerabilities into another piece of software running on the same device.

Advanced Attacks

If you listen to the news during a report of a major cyberbreach, you'll frequently hear commentators referring to advanced attacks. While some cyberattacks are clearly more complex than others and require greater technical prowess to launch, no specific, objective definition of an advanced attack exists. That said, from a subjective perspective, you may consider any attack that requires a significant investment in research and development to be successfully executed to be advanced. Of course, the definition of significant investment is also subjective. In some cases, R&D expenditures are so high and attacks are so sophisticated that there is near universal agreement that an attack was advanced. Some experts consider any zero-day attack to be advanced, but others disagree.

Advanced attacks may be opportunistic, targeted, or a combination of both.

Opportunistic attacks are attacks aimed at as many possible targets as possible in order to find some that are susceptible to the attack that was launched. The attacker doesn't have a list of predefined targets — his targets are effectively any and all reachable systems that are vulnerable to the attack that he is launching. These attacks are similar to someone firing a massive shotgun in an area with many targets in the hope that one or more pellets will hit a target that it can penetrate.

Targeted attacks are attacks that target a specific party and typically involve utilizing a series of attack techniques until one eventually succeeds in penetrating into the target. Additional attacks may be

launched subsequently in order to move around within the target's systems.

Opportunistic attacks

The goal of most opportunistic attacks is usually to make money — which is why the attackers don't care whose systems they breach; money is the same regardless of whose systems are breached in order to make it.

Furthermore, in many cases, opportunistic attackers may not care about hiding the fact that a breach occurred — especially after they've had time to monetize the breach, for example, by selling lists of passwords or credit card numbers that they stole.

While not all opportunistic attacks are advanced, some certainly are.

Opportunistic attacks are quite different than targeted attacks.

Targeted attacks

When it comes to targeted attacks, successfully breaching any systems not on the target list isn't considered even a minor success.

For example, if a Russian operative is assigned the mission to hack into the Democratic and Republican parties' email systems and steal copies of all the email on the parties' email servers, his or her mission is going to be deemed a success only if he achieves those exact aims. If he manages to steal \$1 million from an online bank using the same hacking techniques that he is directing at his targets, it will not change a failure to breach the intended targets into even a small success. Likewise, if the goal of an attacker launching a targeted attack is to take down the website of a former employer that fired him, taking down other websites doesn't accomplish anything in the attacker's mind.

Because such attackers need to breach their targets no matter how well defended those parties may be, targeted attacks often utilize advanced attack methods — for example, exploiting vulnerabilities not known to the public or to the vendors who would need to fix them.

As you may surmise, advanced targeted attacks are typically carried out by parties with much greater technical prowess than those who carry out

opportunistic attacks. Often, but not always, the goal of targeted attacks is to steal data undetected or to inflict serious damage — not to make money. After all, if one's goal is to make money, why expend resources targeting a well-defended site? Take an opportunistic approach and go after the most poorly defended, relevant sites.

Some advanced threats that are used in targeted attacks are described as *advanced persistent threats* (APTs):

- » **Advanced:** Uses advanced hacking techniques, likely with a major budget to support R&D
- » **Persistent:** Keeps trying different techniques to breach a targeted system and won't move on to target some other system just because the initial target is well protected
- » **Threat:** Has the potential to inflict serious damage

Blended (opportunistic and targeted) attacks

Another type of advanced attack is the opportunistic, semi-targeted attack.

If a criminal wants to steal credit card numbers, for example, he may not care whether he successfully steals an equivalent number of active numbers from Best Buy, Walmart, or Barnes & Noble. All that he or she likely cares about is obtaining credit card numbers — from whom the numbers are pilfered isn't relevant.

At the same time, launching attacks against sites that don't have credit card data is a waste of the attacker's time and resources.

Chapter 3

Bad Guys and Accidental Bad Guys: The Folks You Must Defend Against

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Clarifying who the “good guys” are and who the “bad guys” are
 - » Understanding the different types of hackers
 - » Discovering how hackers make money from their crimes
 - » Exploring threats from nonmalicious actors
 - » Defending against hackers and other ways of mitigating against risks
-

Many centuries ago, the Chinese military strategist and philosopher, Sun Tzu, wrote

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.

If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

As has been the case since ancient times, knowing your enemy is critical for your own defense.

Such wisdom remains true in the age of digital security. While [Chapter 2](#) covers many of the threats posed by cyber-enemies, this chapter covers the enemies themselves:

- » Who are they?
- » Why do they launch attacks?
- » How do they profit from attacks?

You also find out about nonmalicious attackers — both people and inanimate parties who can inflict serious damage even without any intent to do harm.

Bad Guys and Good Guys Are Relative Terms

Albert Einstein famously said that “Everything is relative,” and that concept certainly holds true when it comes to understanding who the “good” guys and “bad” guys are online.

As someone seeking to defend himself or herself against cyberattacks, for example, you may view Russian hackers seeking to compromise your computer in order to use it to hack U.S. government sites as bad guys, but to patriotic Russian citizens, they may be heroes.

Likewise, if you live in the West, you may view the creators of *Stuxnet* — a piece of malware that destroyed Iranian centrifuges used for enriching uranium for potential use in nuclear weapons — as heroes. If you’re a member of the Iranian military’s cyber-defense team, however, your feelings are likely quite different. (For more on Stuxnet, see the nearby sidebar.)

STUXNET

Stuxnet is a computer worm that was first discovered in 2010 and is believed to have inflicted, at least temporarily, serious damage to Iran’s nuclear program. To date, nobody has claimed responsibility for creating Stuxnet, but the general consensus in the information security industry is that it was built as a collaborative effort by American and Israeli cyberwarriors.

Stuxnet targets programmable logic controllers (PLCs) that manage the automated control of industrial machinery, including centrifuges used to separate heavier and

lighter atoms of radioactive elements. Stuxnet is believed to have compromised PLCs at an Iranian uranium-enrichment facility by programming centrifuges to spin out of control and effectively self-destruct, all while reporting that everything was functioning properly.

Stuxnet exploited four zero-day vulnerabilities that were unknown to the public and to the vendors involved at the time that Stuxnet was discovered. The worm was designed to propagate across networks — and spread like wildfire — but to go dormant if it didn't detect the relevant PLC and Siemens' software used at the Iranian facility.

If you're an American enjoying free speech online and make posts promoting atheism, Christianity, Buddhism, or Judaism and an Iranian hacker hacks your computer, you'll likely consider him to be a bad guy, but various members of the Iranian government and other fundamentalist Islamic groups may consider the hacker's actions to be a heroic attempt to stop the spread of blasphemous heresy.

In many cases, determining who is good and who is bad may be even more complicated and create deep divides between members of a single culture.

For example, how would you view someone who breaks the law and infringes on the free speech of neo-Nazis by launching a crippling cyberattack against a neo-Nazi website that preaches hate against African Americans, Jews, and gays? Or someone outside of law enforcement who illegally launches attacks against sites spreading child pornography, malware, or jihadist material that encourages people to kill Americans? Do you think that everyone you know would agree with you? Would U.S. courts agree?

Before answering, please consider that in the 1977 case *National Socialist Party of America v. Village of Skokie*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that freedom of speech goes so far as to allow Nazis brandishing swastikas to march freely in a neighborhood in which many survivors of the Nazi Holocaust lived. Clearly, in the world of cyber, only the eye of the beholder can measure good and bad.

For the purposes of this book, therefore, you need to define who the good and bad guys are, and, as such, you should assume that the language in the book operates from your perspective as you seek to

defend yourself digitally. Anyone seeking to harm your interests, for whatever reason, and regardless of what you perceive your interests to be, is, for the purposes of this book, bad.

Bad Guys Up to No Good

A group of potential attackers that is likely well-known to most people are the bad guys who are up to no good. This group consists of multiple types of attackers, with a diverse set of motivations and attack capabilities, who share one goal in common: They all seek to benefit themselves at the expense of others, including, potentially, you.

Bad guys up to no good include

- » Script kiddies
- » Kids who are not kiddies
- » Nations and states
- » Corporate spies
- » Criminals
- » Hacktivists

Script kiddies

The term *script kiddies* (sometimes shortened to skids or just kiddies) refers to people — often young — who hack, but who are able to do so only because they know how to utilize scripts and/or programs developed by others to attack computer systems. These folks lack the technological sophistication needed in order to create their own tools or to hack without the assistance of others.

Kids who are not kiddies

While script kiddies are technologically unsophisticated (see preceding section), plenty of other kids are not.

For many years, the caricature of a hacker has been a young, nerdy male, interested in computers, who hacks from his parents' home or from a

dorm room at college.

In fact, the first crop of hackers targeting civilian systems included many technologically sophisticated kids interested in exploring or carrying out various mischievous tasks for bragging rights or due to curiosity.

While such attackers still exist, the percentage of attacks emanating from these attackers has dropped dramatically from a huge portion to a minute fraction of a percentage of all attacks.

Simply put, teenage hackers similar to those depicted in movies from the 1980s and 1990s may have been a significant force in the precommercial-Internet-era, but once hacking could deliver real money, expensive goods, and valuable, monetizable data, criminals seeking to profit joined the fray en masse. Furthermore, as the world grew increasingly reliant on data and more government and industrial systems were connected to the Internet, nation and states began to dramatically increase the resources that they allocated to cyber-operations from both espionage and military standpoints, further diluting the classic teenage hacker to a minute portion of today's cyberattackers.

Nations and states

Hacking by nations and states has received significant press coverage in recent years. The alleged hackings of the Democratic party email systems by Russian agents during the 2016 Presidential election campaign and the Republican party email system during the 2018 midterm elections are high profile examples of nation state hacking.

Likewise, the Stuxnet malware is an example of nation or state-sponsored malware. (For more on Stuxnet, see the sidebar earlier in this chapter.)

That said, most nation and state cyberattacks are not nearly as high profile as those examples, do not receive media coverage, and do not target high profile targets. Often, they're not even discovered or known to anyone but the attackers!

Furthermore, in some countries, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between nation or state hacking and commercial espionage.

Consider countries in which major companies are owned and operated by the government, for example. Are hackers from such companies nation or state hackers? Are such companies legitimate government targets, or is hacking them an example of corporate espionage?

Of course, nation and states that hack may also be seeking to impact public sentiment, policy decisions, and elections in other nations.

Discussions of this topic have been aired via major media outlets on a regular basis since the 2016 presidential election.

Corporate spies

Unscrupulous companies sometimes utilize hacking as a way to gain competitive advantages or steal valuable intellectual property. The United States government, for example, has repetitively accused Chinese corporations of stealing the intellectual property of American businesses, costing Americans billions of dollars per year. Sometimes the process of stealing intellectual property involves hacking the home computers of employees at targeted companies with the hope that those employees will use their personal devices to connect to their employers' networks.

CHINESE FIRMS STEAL AMERICAN IP: UNIT 61398

In May 2014, United States federal prosecutors charged five members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China with hacking four U.S. businesses and one labor union as part of their service in Unit 61398, China's cyber-warrior unit. The allegedly hacked parties included Alcoa, Allegheny Technologies, SolarWorld, and Westinghouse, all of which are major suppliers of goods to utilities, and the United Steel Workers labor union.

While the full extent of the damage to American businesses caused by the hacking remains unknown to this day, SolarWorld claimed that as a result of confidential information stolen by the hackers, a Chinese competitor appeared to have gained access to SolarWorld's proprietary technology for making solar cells more efficient. This particular case illustrates the blurred lines between nation and state and corporate espionage when it comes to Communist nations and also highlights the difficulty in bringing hackers who participate in such attacks to justice; none of the indicted parties were ever tried, because none have left China to any jurisdiction that would extradite them to the United States.

Criminals

Criminals have numerous reasons for launching various forms of cyberattacks:

- » **Stealing money directly:** Attacking to gain access to someone's online banking account and issue a wire transfer of money to themselves.
- » **Stealing credit card numbers, software, video, music files, and other goods:** Attacking to purchase goods or add bogus shipping instructions into a corporate system leading to products being shipped without payment ever being received by the shipper, and so on.
- » **Stealing corporate and individual data:** Attacking to obtain information that criminals can monetize in multiple ways (see the section "[Monetizing Their Actions](#)," later in this chapter).

Over the years, the type of criminals who commit online crimes has evolved from being strictly solo actors to a mix of amateurs and organized crime.

Hacktivists

Hacktivists are activists who use hacking to spread the message of their “cause” and to deliver justice to parties whom they feel aren’t being otherwise punished for infractions that the activists view as crimes. Hacktivists include terrorists and rogue insiders.

Terrorists

Terrorists may hack for various purposes, including to

- » Directly inflict damage (for example, by hacking a utility and shutting off power)
- » Obtain information to use in plotting terrorist attacks (for example, hacking to find out when weapons are being transported between facilities and can be stolen)
- » Finance terrorist operations (see the earlier section on criminals)

Rogue insiders

Disgruntled employees, rogue contractors, and employees who have been financially incentivized by an unscrupulous party pose serious threats to businesses and their employees alike.



WARNING Insiders intent on stealing data or inflicting harm are normally considered to be the most dangerous group of cyberattackers. They typically know far more than do any outsiders about what data and computer systems a company possesses, where those systems are located, how they are protected, and other information pertinent to the target systems and their potential vulnerabilities. Rogue insiders may target a businesses for one or more reasons:

- » They may seek to disrupt operations in order to lighten their own personal workloads or to help a competitor.
- » They may seek revenge for not receiving a promotion or bonus.
- » They may want to make another employee, or team of employees, look bad.
- » They may want to cause their employer financial harm.
- » They may plan on leaving and want to steal data that will be valuable in their next job or in their future endeavors.

Cyberattackers and Their Colored Hats

Cyberattackers are typically grouped based on their goals:

- » **Black hat hackers** have evil intent and hack in order to steal, manipulate, and/or destroy. When the typical person thinks of a hacker, he or she is thinking of a black hat hacker.

- » **White hat hackers** are ethical hackers who hack in order to test, repair, and enhance the security of systems and networks. These folks are typically computer security experts who specialize in penetration testing, and who are hired by businesses and governments to find vulnerabilities in their IT systems. A hacker is considered to be a white hat hacker only if he or she has explicit permission to hack from the owner of the systems that he or she is hacking.
- » **Grey hat hackers** are hackers who do not have the malicious intent of black hat hackers, but who, at least at times, act unethically or otherwise violate anti-hacking laws. A hacker who attempts to find vulnerabilities in a system without the permission of the system's owner and who reports his or her findings to the owner without inflicting any damage to any systems that he or she scans is acting as a grey hat hacker. Grey hat hackers sometimes act as such to make money. For example, when they report vulnerabilities to system owners, they may offer to fix the problems if the owner pays them some consulting fees. Some of the hackers who many people consider to be black hat hackers are actually grey hats.
- » **Green hat hackers** are novices who seek to become experts. Where a green hat falls within the white-grey-black spectrum may evolve over time, as does his or her level of experience.
- » **Blue hat hackers** are paid to test software for exploitable bugs before the software is released into the market.

For the purposes of this book, black and gray hat hackers are the hackers that should primarily concern you as you seek to cyberprotect yourself and your loved ones.

Monetizing Their Actions

Many, but not all, cyberattackers seek to profit financially from their crimes. Cyberattackers can make money through cyberattacks in several ways:

- » Direct financial fraud
- » Indirect financial fraud
- » Ransomware
- » Cryptominers

Direct financial fraud

Hackers may seek to steal money directly through attacks. For example, hackers may install malware on people's computers to capture victims' online banking sessions and instruct the online banking server to send money to the criminals' accounts. Of course, criminals know that bank systems are often well-protected against such forms of fraud, so many have migrated to target less well-defended systems. For example, some criminals now focus more on capturing login credentials (usernames and passwords) to systems that store credits — for example, coffee shop apps that allow users to store prepaid card values — and steal the money effectively banked in such accounts by using it elsewhere in order to purchase goods and services. Furthermore, if criminals compromise accounts of users that have auto-refill capabilities configured, criminals can repetitively steal the value after each auto-reload. Likewise, criminals may seek to compromise people's frequent traveler accounts and transfer the points to other accounts, purchase goods, or obtain plane tickets and hotel rooms that they sell to other people for cash. Criminals can also steal credit card numbers and either use them or quickly sell them to other crooks who then use them to commit fraud.



REMEMBER *Direct* is not a black-and-white concept; there are many shades of grey.

Indirect financial fraud

Sophisticated cybercriminals often avoid cybercrimes that entail direct financial fraud because these schemes often deliver relatively small dollar amounts, can be undermined by the compromised parties even after the fact (for example, by reversing fraudulent transactions or

invalidating an order for goods made with stolen information), and create relatively significant risks of getting caught. Instead, they may seek to obtain data that they can monetize for indirect fraud. Several examples of such crimes include

- » Profiting off illegal trading of securities
- » Stealing credit card information
- » Stealing goods
- » Stealing data

Profiting off illegal trading of securities

Cybercriminals can make fortunes through illegal trading of securities, such as stocks, bonds, and options, in several ways:

- » **Pump and dump:** Criminals hack a company and steal data, short the company's stock, and then leak the company's data online to cause the company's stock price to drop, at which point they buy the stock (to cover the short sale) at a lower price than they previously sold it.
- » **Bogus press releases and social media posts:** Criminals either buy or sell a company's stock and then release a bogus press release or otherwise spread fake news about a company by hacking into the company's marketing systems or social media accounts and issuing false bad or good news via the company's official channels.
- » **Insider information:** A criminal may seek to steal drafts of press releases from a public company's PR department in order to see whether any surprising quarterly earnings announcements will occur. If the crook finds that a company is going to announce much better numbers than expected by Wall Street, he or she may purchase *call options* (options that give the crook the right to purchase the stock of the company at a certain price), which can skyrocket in value after such an announcement. Likewise, if a company is about to announce some bad news, the crook may short the company's stock or purchase *put options* (options that give the crook the right to sell the

stock of the company at a certain price), which, for obvious reasons, can skyrocket in value if the market price of the associated stock drops.

Discussions of indirect financial fraud of the aforementioned types is not theoretical or the result of paranoid or conspiracy theories; criminals have already been caught engaging in precisely such behavior. These types of scams are often also less risky to criminals than directly stealing money, as it is difficult for regulators to detect such crimes as they happen, and it is nearly impossible for anyone to reverse any relevant transactions. For sophisticated cybercriminals, the lower risks of getting caught coupled with the relatively high chances of success translate into a potential gold mine.

AN INDIRECT FRAUD CASE THAT NETTED CYBERCRIMINALS MORE THAN \$30 MILLION

During the summer of 2015, the United States Department of Justice announced that it filed charges against nine people — some in the United States and some in Ukraine — who it claimed stole 150,000 press releases from wire services and used the information in about 800 of those releases that had not yet been issued to the public to make illegal trades. The government claimed that the profits from the nine individuals' criminal insider trading activity exceeded \$30,000,000.

Stealing credit card information

As often appears in news reports, many criminals seek to steal credit card numbers. Thieves can use these numbers to purchase goods or services without paying. Some criminals tend to purchase electronic gift cards, software serial numbers, or other semi-liquid or liquid assets that they then resell for cash to unsuspecting people, while others purchase actual hard goods and services that they may have delivered to locations such as empty houses, where they can easily pick up the items.

Other criminals don't use the credit cards that they steal. Instead, they sell the numbers on the dark web (that is, portions of the Internet that

can be accessed only when using technology that grants anonymity to those using it) to criminals who have the infrastructure to maximally exploit the credit cards quickly before people report fraud on the accounts and the cards are blocked.

Stealing goods

Besides the forms of theft of goods described in the preceding section, some criminals seek to find information about orders of high-value, small, liquid items, such as jewelry. In some cases, their goal is to steal the items when the items are delivered to the recipients rather than to create fraudulent transactions.

Stealing data

Some criminals steal data so they can use it to commit various financial crimes. Other criminals steal data to sell it to others or leak it to the public. Stolen data from a business, for example, may be extremely valuable to an unscrupulous competitor.

Ransomware

Ransomware is computer malware that prevents users from accessing their files until they pay a ransom to some criminal enterprise. This type of cyberattack alone has already netted criminals billions of dollars (yes, that is billions with a *b*) and endangered many lives as infected hospital computer systems became inaccessible to doctors. Ransomware remains a growing threat, with criminals constantly improving the technical capabilities and earning potential of their cyberweapons. Criminals are, for example, crafting ransomware that, in an effort to obtain larger returns on investment, infects a computer and attempts to search through connected networks and devices to find the most sensitive systems and data. Then, instead of kidnapping the data that it first encountered, the ransomware activates and prevents access to the most valuable information.



REMEMBER Criminals understand that the more important the information is to its owner, the greater the likelihood that a victim will be willing to pay a ransom, and the higher the maximum ransom that will be willingly paid is likely to be.

Ransomware is growing increasingly stealthy and often avoids detection by antivirus software. Furthermore, the criminals who use ransomware are often launching targeted attacks against parties that they know have the ability to pay decent ransoms. Criminals know, for example, that the average American is far more likely to pay \$200 for a ransom than the average person living in China. Likewise, they often target environments in which going offline has serious consequences — a hospital, for example, can't afford to be without its patient records system for any significant period of time.

Cryptominers

A *cryptominer*, in the context of malware, refers to software that usurps some of an infected computer's resources in order to use them to perform the complex mathematical calculations needed to create new units of cryptocurrency. The currency that is created is transferred to the criminal operating the cryptominer. Many modern day cryptominer malware variants utilize groups of infected machines working in concert to do the mining.

Because cryptominers create money for criminals without the need for any involvement by their human victims, cybercriminals, especially those who lack the sophistication to launch high-stakes targeted ransomware attacks, have increasingly gravitated to cryptominers as a quick way to monetize cyberattacks.

While the value of cryptocurrencies fluctuates wildly (at least as of the time of the writing of this chapter), some relatively unsophisticated cryptocurrency mining networks are believed to net their operators more than \$30,000 per month.

Dealing with Nonmalicious Threats

While some potential attackers are intent on benefiting at your expense, others have no intentions of inflicting harm. However, these parties can innocently inflict dangers that can be even greater than those posed by hostile actors.

Human error

Perhaps the greatest cybersecurity danger of all — whether for an individual, business, or government entity — is the possibility of human error. Nearly all major breaches covered in the media over the past decade were made possible, at least in part, because of some element of human error. In fact, human error is often necessary for the hostile actors to succeed with their attacks — a phenomenon about which they're well aware.

Humans: The Achilles' heel of cybersecurity

Why are humans so often the weak point in the cybersecurity chain — making the mistakes that enable massive breaches? The answer is quite simple.

Consider how much technology has advanced in recent years. Electronic devices that are ubiquitous today were the stuff of science-fiction books and movies just one or two generations ago. In many cases, technology has even surpassed predictions about the future — today's phones are much more powerful and convenient than Maxwell Smart's shoe-phone, and Dick Tracy's watch would not even be perceived as advanced enough to be a modern day toy when compared with devices that today cost under \$100.

Security technology has also advanced dramatically over time. Every year multiple new products are launched, and many new, improved versions of existing technologies appear on the market. The intrusion detection technology of today, for example, is so much better than that of even one decade ago that even classifying them into the same category of product offering is questionable.

On the flip side, however, consider the human brain. It took tens of thousands of years for human brains to evolve from that of earlier species — no fundamental improvement takes place during a human lifetime, or even within centuries of generations coming and going. As such, security technology advances far more rapidly than the human mind.

Furthermore, advances in technology often translate into humans needing to interact with, and understand how to properly utilize a growing number of increasingly complex devices, systems, and software. Given human limitations, the chances of people making significant mistakes keep going up over time.

The increasing demand for brainpower that advancing technology places on people is observable even at a most basic level. How many passwords did your grandparents need to know when they were your age? How many did your parents need? How many do you need? And, how easily could remote hackers crack passwords and exploit them for gain in the era of your grandparents? Your parents? Yourself?

Most of your grandparents likely had no more than one or two passwords when they were your age — if not zero. And, none of these passwords were hackable by any remote computers — meaning that both selecting and remembering passwords was trivial, and did not expose them to risk. Today, however, you’re likely to have many dozens of passwords, most of which can be hacked remotely using automated tools, dramatically increasing the relevant risk.



TIP The bottom line: You must internalize that human error poses a great risk to your cybersecurity — and act accordingly.

Social engineering

In the context of information security, *social engineering* refers to the psychological manipulation of human beings into performing actions that they otherwise would not perform and which are usually detrimental to their interests.

Examples of social engineering include

- » Calling someone on the telephone and tricking that person into believing that the caller is a member of the IT department and requesting that the person reset his email password
- » Sending phishing emails (see [Chapter 2](#))
- » Sending CEO fraud emails (see [Chapter 2](#))

While the criminals launching social engineering attacks may be malicious in intent, the actual parties that create the vulnerability or inflict the damage typically do so without any intent to harm the target. In the first example, the user who resets his or her password believes that he or she is doing so to help the IT department repair email problems, not that he or she is allowing hackers into the mail system. Likewise, someone who falls prey to a phishing or CEO fraud scam is obviously not seeking to help the hacker who is attacking him or her.

Other forms of human error that undermine cybersecurity include people accidentally deleting information, accidentally misconfiguring systems, inadvertently infecting a computer with malware, mistakenly disabling security technologies, and other innocent errors that enable criminals to commit all sorts of mischievous acts.



WARNING The bottom line is never to underestimate both the inevitability of, and power of, human mistakes — including your own. You will make mistakes, and so will I — everyone does. So, on important matters, always double-check to make sure that everything is the way it should be.

External disasters

As described in [Chapter 2](#), cybersecurity includes maintaining your data's confidentiality, integrity, and availability. One of the greatest risks to availability — which also creates secondhand risks to its

confidentiality and integrity — is external disasters. These disasters fall into two categories: naturally occurring and man-made.

Natural disasters

A large number of people live in areas prone to some degree to various forms of natural disasters. From hurricanes to tornados to floods to fires, nature can be brutal — and can corrupt, or even destroy, computers and the data that the machines house.

Continuity planning and disaster recovery are, therefore, taught as part of the certification process for cybersecurity professionals. The reality is that, statistically speaking, most people will encounter and experience at least one form of natural disaster at some point in their lives. As such, if you want to protect your systems and data, you must plan accordingly for such an eventuality.

A strategy of storing backups on hard drives at two different sites may be a poor strategy, for example, if both sites consist of basements located in homes within flood zones.

Man-made environmental problems

Of course, nature is not the only party creating external problems. Humans can cause floods and fires, and man-made disasters can sometimes be worse than those that occur naturally. Furthermore, power outages and power spikes, protests and riots, strikes, terrorist attacks, and Internet failures and telecom disruptions can also impact the availability of data and systems.

Businesses that backed up their data from systems located in New York's World Trade Center to systems in the nearby World Financial Center learned the hard way after 9/11 the importance of keeping backups outside the vicinity of the corresponding systems, as the World Financial Center remained inaccessible for quite some time after the World Trade Center was destroyed.

Risks posed by governments and businesses Some cybersecurity risks — including, one might reasonably argue, the most dangerous ones to individuals' privacy — are not created by criminals, but, rather, by businesses and government entities, even in Western democracies.

Cyberwarriors and cyberspies

Modern-day governments often have tremendous armies of cyberwarriors at their disposal.

Such teams often attempt to discover vulnerabilities in software products and systems to use them to attack and spy on adversaries, as well as to use as a law enforcement tool.

Doing so, however, creates risks for individuals and businesses. Instead of reporting vulnerabilities to the relevant vendors, various government agencies often seek to keep the vulnerabilities secret — meaning that they leave their citizens, enterprises, and other government entities vulnerable to attack by adversaries who may discover the same vulnerability.

Additionally, governments may use their teams of hackers to help fight crime — or, in some cases, abuse their cyber-resources to retain control over their citizens and preserve the ruling party's hold on power. Even in the United States, in the aftermath of 9/11, the government implemented various programs of mass data collection that impacted law-abiding U.S. citizens. If any of the databases that were assembled had been pilfered by foreign powers, U.S. citizens may have been put at risk of all sorts of cyberproblems.

The dangers of governments creating troves of data exploits are not theoretical. In recent years, several powerful cyberweapons believed to have been created by a U.S. government intelligence agency surfaced online, clearly having been stolen by someone whose interests were not aligned with those of the agency. To this day, it remains unclear whether those weapons were used against American interests by whoever stole them.

The impotent Fair Credit Reporting Act

Many Americans are familiar with the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), a set of laws initially passed nearly half a century ago and updated on multiple occasions. The FCRA regulates the collection and management of credit reports and the data used therein. The FCRA was

established to ensure that people are treated fairly, and that credit-related information remains both accurate and private.

According to the Fair Credit Reporting Act, credit reporting bureaus must remove various forms of adverse information from people's credit reports after specific time frames elapse. If you don't pay a credit card bill on time while you're in college, for example, it's against the law for the late payment to be listed on your report and factored against you into your credit score when you apply for a mortgage two decades later. The law even allows people who declare bankruptcy in order to start over to have records of their bankruptcy removed. After all, what good would starting over be if a bankruptcy forever prevented someone from having a clean slate?

Today, however, various technology companies undermine the protections of the FCRA. How hard is it for a bank's loan officer to find online databases of court filings related to bankruptcies by doing a simple Google search and then looking into such databases for information relevant to a prospective borrower? Or to see whether any foreclosure records from any time are associated with a name matching that of someone seeking a loan? Doing either takes just seconds, and no laws prohibit such databases from including records old enough to be gone from credit reports, and, at least in the United States, none prohibit Google from showing links to such databases when someone searches on the name of someone involved with such activities decades earlier.

Expunged records are no longer really expunged

The justice system has various laws that, in many cases, allow young people to keep minor offenses off of their permanent criminal records and affords judges the ability to seal certain files and to expunge other forms of information from people's records. These laws help people start over, and many wonderful, productive members of society may not have turned out as they did without these protections.

But what good are such laws if a prospective employer can find the supposedly purged information within seconds by doing a Google search on a candidate's name? Google returns results from local police blotters and court logs published in local newspapers that are now archived

online. Someone who was cited for a minor offense and then had all the charges against him or her dropped can still suffer professional and personal repercussions decades later — even though he or she was never indicted, tried, or found guilty of any offense.

Social Security numbers

A generation ago, it was common to use Social Security numbers as college ID numbers. The world was so different back then that for privacy reasons, many schools even posted people's grades using Social Security numbers rather than using students' names! Yes, seriously.

Should all students who went to college in the 1970s, 1980s, or early 1990s really have their Social Security numbers exposed to the public because college materials that were created in the pre-web world have now been archived online and are indexed in some search engines? To make matters worse, some parties authenticate users by asking for the last four digits of people's phone numbers, which can often be found in a fraction of a second via a cleverly crafted Google or Bing search. If it is common knowledge that such information has been rendered insecure by previously acceptable behaviors, why does the government still utilize Social Security numbers and treat them as if they were still private?

Likewise, online archives of church, synagogue, and other community newsletters often contain birth announcements listing not only the name of the baby and his or her parents, but the hospital in which the child was born, the date of birth, and the grandparents' names. How many security questions for a particular user of a computer system can be undermined by a crook finding just one such announcement? All of these examples show how advances in technology can undermine our privacy and cybersecurity — even legally undermining laws that have been established to protect us.

THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN

The *right to be forgotten* refers to the right of people to either have certain adverse data about them blocked from being Internet accessible or to have entries removed from search engine results on their names if the information in those entries is outdated or

irrelevant. Today, residents of the European Union enjoy the latter of these two rights; Americans enjoy neither.

The rationale behind the right to be forgotten is that it is clearly in society's interest that people not be forever negatively judged, stigmatized, and/or punished as a consequence of some long-ago minor infraction that doesn't represent the nature of their present self. For example, if a 45-year-old professional with a stellar professional and personal history and no criminal record applies for a job, it's unfair to him or her, and detrimental to society as a whole, if he or she would lose that opportunity because search engine results seen by a potential employer show that he or she was charged with disorderly conduct at age 18 for a nonviolent and non-damaging noisy prank carried out when he or she was an immature high school senior nearly three decades prior.

Various nations outside of the EU are also adopting various forms of the right to be forgotten: A court in India — a country that, technically speaking, has no laws on the books guaranteeing anyone the right to be forgotten — has ruled in favor of a plaintiff seeking the removal of accurate information that would reasonably have impacted her reputation, apparently adopting a position that people have an inherent right to prevent the spread of adverse information that may not be outdated, but that is likely to inflict harm on them while providing little benefit to anyone else.

Adopting some form of a right to be forgotten can help reduce some of the cybersecurity and privacy risks discussed in this chapter, by making it more difficult for criminals to obtain the answers to challenge questions, to launch social engineering attacks, and so on. It would also restore some of the protections offered by laws, such as the FCRA, that have been rendered impotent by technology.

Social media platforms

One group of technology businesses that generate serious risks to cybersecurity are social media platforms.

Cybercriminals increasingly scan social media — sometimes with automated tools — to find information that they can use against companies and their employees. Attackers then leverage the information that they find to craft all sorts of attacks, such as one involving the delivery of ransomware. (For more on ransomware, see the relevant section earlier in this chapter.) For example, they may craft highly effective spear-phishing emails credible enough to trick employees into clicking on URLs to ransomware-delivering websites or into opening ransomware-infected attachments.

The number of virtual kidnapping scams — in which criminals contact the family of a person who is off the grid due to being on a flight or the

like and demand a ransom in exchange for releasing the person they claim to have kidnapped — has skyrocketed in the era of social media, as criminals often can discern from looking at users' social media posts both when to act and whom to contact.

MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME

How many times have you been asked your mother's maiden name as a security question in order to prove your identity?

Besides the fact that guessing any common English name will provide a criminal with some hits if he or she is attempting to impersonate people living in the United States, social media has truly undermined this form of challenge question. Cyberattackers can obtain this information from social media in many ways, even if people don't list their relatives in their profiles on any platform — for example, by trying the last names most commonly found among someone's Facebook friends. For many folks, one of those names will be their mother's maiden name.

Google's all-knowing computers

One of the ways that computer systems verify that a person is who he or she claims to be is by asking questions to which few people other than the legitimate party would know the correct answers. In many cases, someone who can successfully answer "How much is your current mortgage payment?" and "Who was your seventh grade science teacher?" is more likely to be the authentic party than an impersonator.

But the all-knowing Google engine undermines such authentication. Many pieces of information that were difficult to obtain quickly just a few years ago can now be obtained almost instantaneously via a Google search. In many cases, the answers to security questions used by various websites to help authenticate users are, for criminals, "just one click away."

While more advanced sites may consider the answer to security questions to be wrong if entered more than a few seconds after the question is posed, most sites impose no such restrictions — meaning that anyone who knows how to use Google can undermine many modern authentication systems.

Mobile device location tracking

Likewise, Google itself can correlate all sorts of data that it obtains from phones running Android or its Maps and Waze applications — which likely means from the majority of people in the Western World. Of course, the providers of other apps that run on millions of phones and that have permission to access location data can do the same as well. Any party that tracks where a person is and for how long he or she is there may have created a database that can be used for all sorts of nefarious purposes — including undermining knowledge-based authentication, facilitating social engineering attacks, undermining the confidentiality of secret projects, and so on. Even if the firm that creates the database has no malicious intent, rogue employees or hackers who gain access to, or steal, the database pose serious threats.

Such tracking also undermines privacy. Google knows, for example, who is regularly going into a chemotherapy facility, where people sleep (for most people, the time that they are asleep is the only time that their phones do not move at all for many hours), and various other information from which all sorts of sensitive extrapolations can be made.

Defending against These Attackers



REMEMBER It is important to understand that there is no such thing as 100 percent cybersecurity. Rather, adequate cybersecurity is defined by understanding what risks exist, which ones are adequately mitigated, and which ones persist.

Defenses that are adequate to shield against some risks and attackers are inadequate to protect against others. What may suffice for reasonably protecting a home computer, for example, may be wildly inadequate to shield an online banking server. The same is true of risks that are based on who uses a system: A cellphone used by the President of the United States for speaking with his or her advisors, for example, obviously

requires better security than the cellphone used by the average sixth grader.

Addressing Risks through Various Methods

Not all risks require attention, and not all risks that do require attention require addressing in the same manner. You may decide, for example, that buying insurance is sufficient protection against a particular risk or that the risk is so unlikely and/or de minimis so as to be not worth the likely cost of addressing it.

On the other hand, sometimes risks are so great that a person or business may decide to abandon a particular effort altogether in order to avoid the associated risk. For example, if the cost of adequately securing a small business would consistently be more than the profit that the business would have made without the security, it may be unwise to open up shop in the first place.

Part 2

Improving Your Own Personal Security

IN THIS PART ...

Understand why you may be less cybersecure than you think.

Find out how to protect against various cyberdangers.

Learn about physical security as it relates to cybersecurity.

Chapter 4

Evaluating Your Current Cybersecurity Posture

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering why you may not be as cybersecure as you think you are
 - » Understanding how to protect against risks
 - » Evaluating your current security measures
 - » Taking a look at privacy
 - » Adopting best practices
-

The first step in improving your protection against cyberthreats is to understand exactly what it is that you need to protect. Only after you have a good grasp on that information can you evaluate what is actually needed to deliver adequate security and determine whether you have any gaps to address.

You must consider what data you have, from whom you must protect it, and how sensitive it is to you. What would happen if, for example, it were publicized on the Internet for the world to see? Then you can evaluate how much you're willing to spend — timewise and moneywise — on protecting it.

Identifying Ways You May Be Less than Secure

You need to understand the various areas in which your current cybersecurity posture may suffer so that you can figure out how to

address the issues and ensure that you're adequately protected. You must inventory all items that could contain sensitive data, become launching pads for attacks, and so on.

Your home computer(s)

Your home computers may suffer from one or major types of potential problems relevant to cybersecurity:

- » **Breached:** A hacker may have penetrated your home computer and be able to use it much as you can — view its contents, use it to contact other machines, leverage it as a staging ground from which to attack other machines and penetrate them, mine cryptocurrency, view data on your network, and so on.
- » **Malware:** Similar to the dangers created by human invaders, a computer-based attacker — that is *malware* — may be present on your home computer, enabling a criminal to use the computer much as you can — view the computer's contents, contact other machines, mine cryptocurrency, and so on — as well as read data from your network traffic and to infect other computers on your network and outside of it.
- » **Shared computers:** When you share a computer with other people — including your significant other and your children — you expose your device to the risk that the other folks using it won't practice proper cyber-hygiene to the same level that you do and, as a result, expose the device to infection by malware or a breach by some hacker or unintentionally inflict self-damage.
- » **Connections to other networks and storage applications:** If you connect your computer via a virtual private network (VPN) to other networks, such as the network at your place of employment, network-borne malware on those remote networks or hackers lurking on devices connected to those networks can potentially attack your network and local devices as well. In some cases, similar risks may exist if you run applications that connect your computer to remote services, such as remote storage systems.

- » **Physical security risks:** As discussed in detail in [Chapter 5](#), the physical location of your computer may endanger it and its contents.

Your mobile devices

From an information security standpoint, mobile devices are inherently risky because they

- » Are constantly connected to the insecure Internet
- » Often have confidential information stored on them
- » Are used to communicate with many people and systems, both of which are groups that include parties who aren't always trustworthy, via the Internet (which is also inherently not trustworthy)
- » Can receive inbound messages from parties with which you have never interacted prior to receiving the messages in question
- » Often don't run full-blown security software due to resource limitations
- » Can easily be lost, stolen, or accidentally damaged or destroyed
- » Connect to insecure and untrusted Wi-Fi networks

Your gaming systems

Gaming systems are computers and, as computers, can sometimes be exploited for various nefarious purposes in addition to game-specific mischief. If the devices contain software vulnerabilities, for example, they may be able to be hacked and commandeered, and software other than the gaming system can potentially be run on them.

Your Internet of Things (IoT) devices

As discussed in detail in [Chapter 17](#), the world of the connected computing has changed dramatically in recent years. Not that long ago, the only devices that were connected to the Internet were classic computers — desktops, laptops, and servers that could be used for many different computing purposes. Today, however, we live in a different world.

From smartphones to security cameras, refrigerators to cars, and coffeemakers to exercise equipment, electronic devices of all types now have computers embedded within them, and many of these computers are perpetually connected to the Internet.

The Internet of Things (IoT), as the ecosystem of connected devices is commonly known, has been growing exponentially over the past few years, yet the security of such devices is often inadequate.

Many IoT devices do not contain adequate security technology to secure themselves against breaches. Even those that do are often not properly configured to be secure. Hackers can exploit IoT devices to spy on you, steal your data, hack or launch denial-of-service attacks against other devices, and inflict various other forms of damage.

Your networking equipment

Networking equipment can be hacked to route traffic to bogus sites, capture data, launch attacks, block Internet access, and so on.

Your work environment

You may have sensitive data in your work environment — and you can be put at risk by colleagues at work as well.

For example, if you bring any electronic devices to work, connect them to a network at work, and then bring those devices home and connect them to your home network, malware and other problems can potentially spread to your device from a device belonging to your employer or to any one or more of your colleagues using the same infrastructure and then later spread from your device to other machines on your home network.

Social engineering

Every person in your family and social circle poses risks to you as a source of information about you that can potentially be exploited for social engineering purposes. I discuss social engineering in detail in [Chapter 8](#).

Identifying Risks

To secure anything, you must know what it is that you're securing; securing an environment is difficult, if not impossible, to do if you do not know what is in that environment.

To secure yourself, therefore, you must understand what assets — both those that are in digital formats and those in related physical formats — you have, and what it is that you seek to protect. You must also understand what risks you face to those assets.



TIP Inventorying such assets is usually pretty simple for individuals: Make a written list of all devices that you attach to your network. You can often get a list by logging into your router and looking at the Connected devices section. Of course, you may have some devices that you connect to your network only occasionally or that must be secured even though they do not attach to your network, so be sure to include those on your list as well.

Add to that list — in a separate section — all storage devices that you use, including external hard drives, flash drives, and memory cards.

Write or print the list; forgetting even a single device can lead to problems.

Protecting against Risks

After you identify what you must protect (see preceding section), you must develop and implement appropriate safeguards for those items to keep them as secure as appropriate and limit the impact of a potential breach.

In the context of home users, protecting includes providing barriers to anyone seeking to access your digital and physical assets without proper authorization to do so, establishing (even informal) processes and

procedures to protect your sensitive data, and creating backups of all configurations and basic system restore points.

Basic elements of protection for most individuals include

- » Perimeter defense
- » Firewall/router
- » Security software
- » Your physical computer(s)
- » Backup

Perimeter defense

Defending your cyber-perimeter is essentially the digital equivalent of building a moat around a castle — attempting to stop anyone from entering except through authorized pathways while under the watchful eyes of guards.

You can build that digital moat by never connecting any computer directly to your Internet modem. Instead connect a firewall/router to the modem and connect computers to the firewall/router. (If your modem contains a firewall/router, then it serves both purposes; if your connection is to the firewall/router portion, not to the modem itself, that is okay.) Normally, the connections between firewalls and modems are wired — that is, are achieved using a physical network cable.

Firewall/router

Modern routers used in home environments include firewalling capabilities that block most forms of inbound traffic when such traffic isn't generated as the result of activities initiated by devices protected by the firewall. That is, a firewall will block outsiders from trying to contact a computer inside your home, but it will not block a web server from responding if a computer inside your home requests a web page from the server. Routers use multiple technologies to achieve such protection.

One important technology of note is Network Address Translation, which allows computers on your home network to use Internet Protocol

(IP) addresses that are invalid for use on the Internet and can be used only on private networks. To the Internet, all the devices appear to use one address, which is that of the firewall.

The following recommendations help your router/firewall protect you:

- » **Keep your router up to date.** Make sure to install all updates before initially putting your router into use and regularly check for new updates (unless your router has an auto-update feature, in which case you should leverage that feature).



REMEMBER An unpatched vulnerability in your router can allow outsiders to enter your network.

- » **Change the default administrative password on your firewall/router to a strong password that only you know.** Write it down and put the paper in a safe or safe deposit box. Practice logging into the router — and continue doing so on a regular basis so that you do not forget the password.
- » **Don't use the default name provided by your router for your Wi-Fi network name (its SSID).** Create a new name.
- » **Configure your Wi-Fi network to use encryption of at least the WPA2 standard.** This is the current standard at the time of the writing of this book.
- » **Establish a password that any device is required to know to join your Wi-Fi network.** Make that password a strong one. For information on creating strong passwords that you can easily remember, see [Chapter 7](#).
- » **If all your wireless devices know how to use the modern 802.11ac and 802.11n wireless networking protocols, disable older Wi-Fi protocols that your router supports** — for example, 802.11b and 802.11g.
- » **Enable MAC address filtering or make sure that all members of your household know that nobody is to connect anything to the**

wired network without your permission. At least in theory, MAC address filtering prevents any device from connecting to the network if you do not previously configure the router to allow it to connect — do not allow people to connect insecure devices to the network without first securing them.

- » **Locate your wireless router centrally within your home.** Doing so will provide better signal for you and will also reduce the strength of the signal that you provide to people outside your home who may be seeking to piggyback onto your network.
- » **Do not enable remote access to your router.** You want the router to be manageable only via connections from devices that it is protecting, not from the outside world. The convenience of remote management of a home firewall is rarely worth the increase in security risk created by enabling such a feature.
- » **Maintain a current list of devices connected to your network.** Also include devices that you allow to connect to your network.
- » **For any guests for whom you want to give network access, turn on the guest network capability of the router and, as with the private network, activate encryption and require strong password.** Give guests access to that guest network and not to your primary network. The same applies for anyone else to whom you must give Internet access but whose security you do not fully trust, including family members, such as children.
- » **If you're sufficiently technically knowledgeable to turn off DHCP and change the default IP address range used by the router for the internal network, do so.** Doing so interferes with some automated hacking tools and provides other security benefits. If you're not familiar with such concepts or don't have a clue what the aforementioned sentence means, simply ignore this paragraph. In this case, the security benefits of the recommendation are likely going to be outweighed by the problems that you may encounter due to the additional technical complexity that turning off DHCP and changing the default IP address range can create.

Security software

How should you use security software to protect yourself?

- » Use security software on all your computers and mobile devices. The software should contain at least antivirus and personal device firewall capabilities.
- » Use antispam software on any device on which you read email.
- » Enable remote wipe on any and every mobile device.
- » Require a strong password to log in to any computer and mobile device.
- » Enable auto-updates whenever possible and keep your devices updated.

Your physical computer(s)

To physically secure your computers:

- » **Control physical access to your computer and keep it in a safe location.** If anyone entering your home can get to a machine, for example, that device can be relatively easily stolen, used, or damaged without your knowledge.
- » **If possible, do not share your computer with family members.** If you must share your computer, create separate accounts for each family member and do not give any other users of the device administrative privileges on it.
- » **Do not rely on deleting data before throwing out, recycling, donating, or selling an old device.** Use a multiwipe erasure system for all hard drives and solid state drives. Ideally, remove the storage media from the computer before getting rid of the device — and physically destroy the storage media.

Backup

Back up regularly. For more on backups, see [Chapter 13](#).

Detecting

Detecting refers to implementing mechanisms by which you can detect cybersecurity events as quickly as possible after they commence. While most home users do not have the budget to purchase specialized products for the purpose of detection, that does not mean that the detection phase of security should be ignored.

Today, most personal computer security software has detection capabilities of various types. Make sure that every device that you manage has security software on it that looks for possible intrusions, for example, and see [Chapter 11](#) for more details on detecting possible breaches.

Responding

Responding refers to acting in response to a cybersecurity incident. Most security software will automatically prompt users to act if they detect potential problems.

For more on responding, see [Chapter 12](#).

Recovering

Recovering refers to restoring an impacted computer, network, or device — and all of its relevant capabilities — to its fully functioning, proper state after a cybersecurity event occurs. See [Chapters 12, 14](#), and [15](#) for more on recovering.



REMEMBER Ideally, a formal, prioritized plan for how to recover should be documented before it is needed. Most home users do not actually create one, but doing so can be extremely beneficial. In most home cases, such a plan will be less than one page long.

Improving

Shame on anyone who does not learn from his or her own mistakes. Every cybersecurity incident offers lessons learned that can be put into

action to reduce risk in the future. For examples of learning from mistakes, see [Chapter 19](#).

Evaluating Your Current Security Measures

After you know what you need to protect and how to protect such items, you can determine the difference between what you need and what you currently have in place.

The following sections cover some things to consider. Not all of the following apply in every case:

Software

When it comes to software and cybersecurity, think about the following questions for each device:

- » Are all the software packages (including the operating system itself) on your computer legally obtained — and known to be legitimate versions?
- » Are all the software packages (including the operating system itself) currently supported by their respective vendors?
- » Are all the software packages (including the operating system itself) up-to-date?
- » Are all the software packages (including the operating system itself) set to automatically update?
- » Is security software on the device?
- » Is the security software configured to auto-update?
- » Is the security software up-to-date?
- » Does the security software include antimalware technology — and is that capability fully enabled?
- » Are virus scans configured to run after every update is applied?

- » Does the software include firewall technology — and is that capability fully enabled?
- » Does the software include antispam technology — and is that capability fully enabled? If not, is other antispam software present, and is it running?
- » Does the software include remote lock and/or remote wipe technology — and is that capability fully enabled? If not, is other remote lock/remote wipe software present, and is it running?
- » Are all other aspects of the software enabled? If not, what is not?
- » Is backup software running that will back up the device as part of a backup strategy?
- » Is encryption enabled for at least all sensitive data stored on the device?
- » Are permissions properly set for the software — locking out people who may have access to the device, but who should not have access to the software?
- » Have permissions been set to prevent software from making changes to the computer that you may not want done (for example, is any software running with administrator privileges when it should not be)?

Of course, all these questions refer to software on a device that you use, but that you don't expose to use by untrusted, remote outsiders. If you have devices that are used as in the latter case — for example, a web server — you must address many other security issues, which are beyond the scope of this book.

Hardware

For all your hardware devices, consider the following questions:

- » Was the hardware obtained from a trusted party? (If you bought an IP-based camera directly from China via some online retailer than you never of heard of prior to making the purchase, for example, the answer to this question may not be yes.)

- » Is all your hardware adequately protected from theft and damage (rain, electrical spikes, and so on) as it resides in its home location?
- » What protects your hardware when it travels?
- » Do you have an uninterruptible power supply or built-in battery protecting the device from a hard, sudden shut-off if power fails even momentarily?
- » Is all your hardware running the latest firmware — and did you download that firmware from a reliable source, such as the vendor’s website or via an update initiated from within the device’s configuration tool?
- » For routers (and firewalls), does your device meet the criteria listed as recommendations in the “[Firewall/router](#)” section earlier in this chapter?
- » Do you have a BIOS password, locking a device from use until a password is entered?
- » Have you disabled all wireless protocols that you do not need? If you’re not using Bluetooth on a laptop, for example, turn off the Bluetooth radio, which not only improves security, but also helps your battery last longer.

Insurance

While cybersecurity insurance is often overlooked, especially by smaller businesses and individuals, it is a viable way of mitigating some cyber-risks. Depending on the particulars of your situation, purchasing a policy protecting against specific risks may make sense.

If you own a small business that may go bankrupt if a breach occurs, you will, of course, want to implement strong security. But, as no security is 100 percent perfect and foolproof, purchasing a policy to cover catastrophic situations may be wise.

Education

A little bit of education can go a long way in helping to prevent the people in your household from becoming the Achilles’ heels of your

cybersecurity. The following list covers some things to think about and discuss:

- » Do all your family members know what their rights and responsibilities are regarding vis-à-vis technology in the house, vis-à-vis connecting devices to the home network, and vis-à-vis allowing guest to connect to the home network (or the guest network)?
- » Have you taught your family members about the risks they need to be aware — for example, phishing emails. Do you have confidence that they “get it”?
- » Have you ensured that everyone in the family who uses devices knows about cybersecurity hygiene (for example, not clicking on links in emails)?
- » Have you ensured that everyone in the family who uses devices knows about password selection and protection?
- » Have you ensured that everyone in the family who uses social media knows about what can and can’t be safely shared?
- » Have you ensured that everyone in the family understand the concept on thinking before acting?

Privacy 101

Technology threatens personal privacy in many ways: Ubiquitous cameras watch you on a regular basis, technology companies track your online behaviors via all sorts of technical methods, and mobile devices track your location.

While technology has certainly made the task of maintaining privacy far more challenging than doing so was just a few years ago, privacy is not dead. You can do many things to improve your level of privacy, even in the modern, connected era.

Think before you share

People often willingly overshare information when asked for it. Consider the paperwork that the typical doctor's office, which you have likely been asked to complete at more than one facility at your initial appointment with the doctor in question. While the answers to many of the questions are relevant and may contain information that is valuable for the doctor to know to properly evaluate and treat you, other portions are probably not. Many (if not most) such forms ask patients for their Social Security numbers. Such information was needed decades ago when medical insurance companies typically used Social Security numbers as insurance ID numbers, but that practice has long since ended. Perhaps some facilities use the Social Security number to report your account to credit bureaus if you don't pay your bills, but, in most cases, the reality is that the question is a vestige of the past, and you can leave the field blank.



REMEMBER Even if you don't believe that a party asking you for personal data would ever abuse the information that it collected about you, as the number of parties that have private information about you increases, and as the quantity and quality of that data grows, the odds that you will suffer a privacy violation due to a data breach go up.

If you want to improve your privacy, the first thing to do is to consider what information you may be disclosing about yourself and your loved ones before you disclose it. This is true when interacting with government agencies, corporations, medical facilities, and other individuals. If you do not need to provide private information, don't.

Think before you post

Consider the implications of any social media post before making it — there could be adverse consequences of many sorts, including effectively compromising the privacy of information. For example, criminals can leverage shared information about a person's family relationships, place

of employment, and interests as part of identity theft and to social engineer their way into your accounts.



WARNING If, by choice or due to the negligent policies of a provider, you use your mother's maiden name as a de facto password, make sure that you do not make it easy for criminals to find out that name by listing your mother as your mother on Facebook or by being friends on Facebook with many cousins whose last name is the same as your mother's maiden name. Often, people can obtain someone's mother's maiden name simply by selecting from another person's Facebook friends list the most common last name that is not the same as the account holder's name.

Sharing information about a person's children and their schedules may help facilitate all sorts of problems — including potentially kidnapping, break-ins into the person's home while he is carpooling to work, or other harmful actions.

Sharing information related to medical activities may lead to disclosure of sensitive and private information. For example, photographs or location data placing a person at a particular medical facility may divulge that the person suffers from a condition that the facility is known to specialize in treating.

Sharing various types of information or images may impact a user's personal relationships and leak private information about such.

Sharing information or images may leak private information about potentially controversial activities in which a person has engaged — for example, consuming alcohol or using recreational drugs, using various weapons, participating in certain controversial organizations, and so on. Even disclosing that one was at a particular location at a certain time may inadvertently compromise the privacy of sensitive information.



REMEMBER Also, keep in mind that the problem of oversharing is not limited to social networks. Oversharing information via chat, email, group chats, and so on is a serious modern day problem as well. Sometimes people do not realize that they are oversharing, and sometimes they accidentally paste the wrong data into emails or attach the wrong files to emails.

General privacy tips

In addition to thinking before you share, you can do a few other things to reduce your exposure to risks of oversharing:

- » **Use social media privacy settings.** In addition to not sharing private information (see preceding section), make sure that your privacy settings on social media are set to protect your data from viewing by members of the public — unless the post in question is intended for public consumption.
- » **But do not rely on them.** Nonetheless, never rely on social media security settings to ensure the privacy of information. Significant vulnerabilities that undermine the effectiveness of various platforms' security controls have been repetitively discovered.
- » **Keep private data out of the cloud unless you encrypt the data.** Never store private information in the cloud unless you encrypt it. Do not rely on the encryption provided by the cloud provider to ensure your privacy. If the provider is breached, in some cases the encryption can be undermined as well.
- Do not store private information in cloud applications designed for sharing and collaboration.** For example, do not store a list of your passwords, photos of your driver's license or passport, or confidential medical information in a Google doc. This may seem obvious, but many people do so anyway.
- » **Leverage the privacy settings of a browser — or better yet, use Tor.** If you're using the a web browser to access material that you

don't want associated with you, at a minimum, turn on Private/Incognito Mode (which offers only partial protection), or, if possible, use a web browser like the Tor Browser Bundle (which contains obfuscated routing, default strong privacy settings, and various, preconfigured, privacy add-ons).

If you do not take precautions when using a browser, you may be tracked. If you search for detailed information on a medical condition in a normal browser window, various parties will likely capitalize on that data. You have probably seen the effects of such tracking — for example, when ads appear on one web page related to something that you searched for on another.

- » **Do not publicize your real cellphone number.** Get a forwarding number from a service like Google Voice and, in general, give out that number rather than your actual cellphone number. Doing so helps protect against many risks — SIM swapping, spam, and so on.
- » **Store private materials offline.** Ideally, store highly sensitive materials offline, such as in a fireproof safe or in a bank safe deposit box. If you must store them electronically, store them on a computer with no network connection.
- » **Encrypt all private information,** such as documents, images, videos, and so on. If you're not sure if something should be encrypted, it probably should.
- » **If you use online chat, use end-to-end encryption.** Assume that all your text messages sent via regular cellphone service (SMS messages) can potentially be read by outsiders. Ideally, do not share sensitive information in writing. If you must share some sensitive item in writing, encrypt the data.



TIP The simplest way to encrypt data is to use a chat application that offers end-to-end encryption. *End-to-end* means that the messages are encrypted on your device and decrypted on the recipient's device and vice versa — with the provider effectively

unable to decrypt the messages; as such, it takes far more effort by hackers who breach the provider's servers to read your messages if end-to-end encryption is utilized. (Sometimes, providers claim that hackers can't read such messages altogether, which isn't correct, for two reasons: 1. Hackers may be able to see the metadata — for example, with whom you chatted and when you did so, and 2. If hackers breach enough internal servers, they may be able to upload to the app store a poisoned version of the app containing a backdoor of some sort.) WhatsApp is probably the most popular chat application that uses end-to-end encryption.

» **Practice proper cyberhygiene.** Because so much of the information that you want to keep private is stored in electronic form, practicing proper cyber-hygiene is critical to preserving privacy. See the tips in [Chapter 18](#).

TURNING ON PRIVACY MODE

To turn on privacy mode:

- **Google Chrome:** Control + Shift + N or choose New incognito window from the menu
- **Firefox:** Control + Shift + P or choose New private window from the menu
- **Opera:** Control + Shift + N or choose New private window from the menu
- **Microsoft Edge:** Control + Shift + P or choose New inprivate window from the menu
- **Vivaldi:** Control + Shift + N or choose New private window from the menu
- **Safari:** Command + Shift + N or choose New private window from the File menu

Banking Online Safely

Eschewing online banking due to the security concerns that it creates is simply not practical for most people living in the modern age. Fortunately, you don't have to give up the relevant conveniences to stay

secure. In fact, I'm keenly aware of the risks involved because I have been banking online since online banking was first offered by several major financial institutions in the mid-1990s as a replacement for direct-dial-up banking services. Here are some suggestions of what you can do to improve your security as you bank online:

- » **Your online banking password should be strong, unique, and committed to memory** — not stored in a database, password manager, or anywhere else electronic. (If you want to write it down and keep the paper in a safe deposit box, that is okay — but rarely necessary.)
- » **Choose a random Personal Identification Number (PIN) for your ATM card and/or phone identification.** The PIN should be unrelated to any information that you know. Don't use a PIN that you have used for some other purpose and don't establish any PINs or passwords based on the one you chose for your ATM card. Never write down your PIN. Never add it to any computer file. Never tell your PIN to anyone, including bank employees.
- » **Consider asking your bank for an ATM card that can't be used as a debit card.** While such cards may lack the ability to be used to buy goods and services, if you make your purchases using credit cards, you don't need the purchase feature on your ATM card. By preventing the card from being used as a debit card, you make it more likely that only someone who knows your PIN number can take money out of your account. Perhaps equally as important is that "crippled" ATM cards can also not be used by crooks to make fraudulent purchases.



REMEMBER If your debit card is used fraudulently, you're out money and need to get it back. If your credit card is used fraudulently, you're not out any money unless an investigation reveals that you were the one doing the defrauding.

- » **Log in to online banking only from trusted devices that you control, that have security software on them, and that are kept up to date.**
- » **Log in to online banking only from secure networks that you trust.** If you're on the road, use your cellular provider's connection, not public Wi-Fi.
- » **Log in to online banking using a web browser or the official app of the bank.** Never log in from a third-party app or an app obtained from anywhere other than the official app store for your device's platform.
- » **Sign up for alerts from your bank.** You should configure to be alerted by text message and/or email any time a new payee is added, a withdrawal is made, and so on.
- » **Use multifactor authentication and protect any device used for such authentication.** If you generate one-time passwords on your phone, for example, and your phone is stolen, your second factor becomes (at least temporarily) usable by the crook and not by you.
- » **Do not allow your browser to store your online banking password.** Your online banking password should not be written down anywhere — certainly not in a system that will enter it on behalf of someone using a web browser.
- » **Enter the URL of your bank every time you visit the bank on the web.** Never click links to it.
- » **Ideally, use a separate computer for online banking than you use for online shopping, email access, and social media.** If that isn't possible or practical, use a different web browser — and be sure to keep that browser up to date.



TIP As an extra precaution, you can configure your browser to remember the wrong password to a site so that if someone ever does get into your laptop or phone, he or she will be less likely to successfully log into that site using your credentials.

- » **Make sure to secure any devices from which you bank online.** That includes physically securing them (don't leave them on a table in a restaurant while going to the restroom), requiring a password to unlock them, and enabling remote wipe.
- » **Monitor your account for unauthorized activity.**

Safely Using Smart Devices

As I discuss in detail in [Chapter 17](#), smart devices and the so-called Internet of Things create all sorts of cybersecurity risks. Here are some recommendations as to how to improve your security as you use such devices:

- » **Make sure that none of your IoT devices create security risks in the event of a failure.** Never create a situation in which a smart lock prevents you from leaving a room during a fire, for example, or lets robbers into your house during a power outage or network failure.
- » **If possible, run your IoT devices on a separate network than your computers.** The IoT network should have a firewall protecting it.
- » **Keep all IoT devices up to date.** Hackers have exploited vulnerabilities in IoT devices to commandeer the devices and use them to carry out major attacks. If a device has a firmware auto-update capability, consider enabling it.
- » **Keep a full, current list of all devices connected to your network.** Also keep a list of all devices that are not currently connected but that are authorized to connect and sometimes do connect.
- » **If possible, disconnect devices when you're not using them.** If a device is offline, it is obviously not hackable by anyone not physically present at the device.
- » **Password-protect all devices.** Never maintain the default passwords that come with the devices. Each device should have a unique login and password.

- » **Check your devices' settings.** Many devices come with default setting values that are terrible from a security perspective.
- » **Keep your smartphone physically and digitally secure.** It likely runs apps with access to some or all of your devices,
- » **If possible, disable device features that you do not need.** Doing so reduces the relevant attack surface — that is, it reduces the number of potential points at which an unauthorized user can attempt to hack into the device — and simultaneously lowers the chances of the device exposing an exploitable software vulnerability.
Universal Plug and Play simplifies device setup, but it also makes it easier for hackers to discover devices and attack them for many reasons, including that many implementations of UPnP contain vulnerabilities, UPnP can sometimes allow malware to bypass firewall security routines, and UPnP can sometimes be exploited by hackers to run commands on routers.
- » **Do not connect your IoT devices to untrusted networks.**

Chapter 5

Enhancing Physical Security

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding the basics of physical security for data and electronic devices
 - » Identifying what needs protection
 - » Reducing physical security risks
-

You may be tempted to skip this chapter — after all, you are reading this book to learn about cybersecurity, not physical security.

But, don't.

Certain aspects of physical security are essential ingredients of any cybersecurity program, whether formal or informal. In fact, just a few decades ago, the teams responsible for protecting computers and the data housed within them focused specifically on physical security. Locking a computer in a secured area accessible by only authorized personnel was often sufficient to protect it and its contents. Of course, the dawn of networks and the Internet era, coupled with the mass proliferation of computing devices, totally transformed the risks. Today, even computers locked in a physical location can still be accessed electronically by billions of people around the world. That said, the need for physical security is as important as ever.

This chapter covers elements of physical security that are necessary in order to implement and deliver proper cybersecurity. I cover the “what and why” that you need to know about physical security in order to keep yourself cyber-secure. Ignoring the concepts discussed in this chapter may put you at risk of a data breach equivalent to, or even worse than, one carried out by hackers.

Understanding Why Physical Security Matters

Physical security means protecting something from unauthorized physical access, whether by man or nature. Keeping a computer locked in an office server closet, for example, to prevent people from tampering with it is an example of physical security.

The goal of physical security is to provide a safe environment for the people and assets of a person, family, or organization. Within the context of cybersecurity, the goal of physical security is to ensure that digital systems and data are not placed at risk because of the manner in which they're physically housed.

SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON'S EMAIL PROBLEM

Whenever politicians or journalists attack former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for storing sensitive information on a server located inside a spare closet in her home in Chappaqua, New York, they're effectively accusing her of endangering national security by placing sensitive digital data in an insufficiently secure physical location. After all, as far as the risks of Internet-based hackers are concerned, digital security is what matters; to hackers from China and Russia, for example, whether her server was located in her spare closet or in a data center protected by armed guards is irrelevant.

The security experts who devised our national security procedures for the handling of classified information understood the necessity of keeping such data physically secure — it is, generally speaking, against the law to remove classified information from the secure locations in which it's intended to be handled. While many modern-day workers may telecommute and bring work home with them at times, folks who handle classified information can be sentenced to serve time in prison for even attempting to do the same with classified data.

The laws governing the protection of classified information prohibit removing it from classified networks, which are never supposed to be connected to the Internet. All people who handle classified information are required to obtain clearances and be trained on the handling of sensitive information; they are required by federal law to understand, and to adhere to, strict rules. As such, Sec. Clinton should have never removed classified information from classified networks and should never have brought it home or accessed it via a server in her home.

In fact, people can be charged with a crime for mishandling classified information — even if they do so inadvertently, which is a point that the Republicans mentioned repetitively during the 2016 Presidential election.



REMEMBER *Classified information* contains secrets whose compromise can endanger American intelligence agents and operations, undermine diplomatic and military operations, and harm national security.

I hope that you're not storing highly sensitive classified files in your home. If you are, you had better know a lot more about information security than is taught in this book; because removing classified information from its proper storage location is often a serious crime, I suggest that you get yourself a good lawyer. (See the nearby sidebar "[Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's email problem.](#)")

Nonetheless, I do assume that you do have data that you want to remain confidential, available, and free from corruption. It may not be classified in the government sense, but, to you, its privacy may be of vital importance.

Taking Inventory

Before you implement a physical security plan, you need to understand what it is that you have to secure. You likely possess more than one type of electronic device and have data that varies quite a bit in terms of the level of secrecy and sensitivity that you attach to it. Step 1 in implementing proper physical security is to understand what data and systems you have and determine what type of security level each one demands.

In all likelihood, your computer devices fall into two categories:

- » **Stationary devices**, such as a desktop computer sitting in your family room on which your teenagers play video games
- » **Mobile devices**, such as laptops, tablets, and cellphones



REMEMBER Don't forget to inventory the equipment to which your devices are connected. When you inventory your devices, pay attention to networks and networking equipment. To what networks are stationary devices attached? How many networks are in place? Where do they connect to the outside world? Where is the relevant network equipment located? What mobile devices connect to wirelessly?

Stationary devices

Stationary devices, such as desktop computers, networking equipment, and many Internet-of-Things devices (IoT), such as wired cameras, are devices that don't move from location to location on a regular basis.

These devices can, of course, still be stolen, damaged, or misused, and, therefore, must be adequately protected. Damage need not be intentionally inflicted — early in my career I helped troubleshoot a server problem that began when a nighttime custodian unplugged an improperly secured server from its uninterruptible power supply in order to plug in a vacuum cleaner. Yes, seriously. As it is imperative to secure stationary devices in the locations in which they “live,” you must inventory all such devices. Securing something that you do not know that you possess is difficult, if not impossible.



REMEMBER In many cases, anyone who can physically access a computer or other electronic device can access all the data and programs on that device, regardless of security systems in place. The only question is how long it will take that party to gain the unauthorized access that it desires. Never mind that anyone who can access a device can physically damage it — whether by physically striking it, sending into it a huge power surge, dumping water on it, or setting it ablaze. In case you think that these scenarios are far-fetched, know that I have seen all four of these options utilized by people intent on damaging computers.

Mobile devices

Mobile devices are computerized devices that are frequently moved. Laptops, tablets, and smartphones are all mobile devices.

In some ways mobile devices are inherently more secure than stationary devices — you likely always have your cellphone with you, so it's not sitting at home unwatched for long periods of time as a computer may be.

That said, in reality, experience shows that portability dramatically increases the chances of a device being lost or stolen. In fact, in some ways, mobile devices are the stuff of security professionals' nightmares. The “smartphone” in your pocket is constantly connected to an insecure network (the Internet), contains highly sensitive data, has access tokens to your email, social media, and a whole host of other important accounts, likely lacks security software of the sophistication that is on desktop computers, is frequently in locations in which it is likely to be stolen, is often out of sight, is taken on trips that cause you to deviate from your normal routine, and so on.

Properly inventorying every mobile device so that you can properly secure all such devices is critical.

SMARTPHONES ARE A LOT MORE THAN SMART PHONES

The term *smartphone* is extremely misleading — the device in your pocket is a full-blown computer with more processing power than all the computers used to first put a man on the moon combined. It is only a smartphone in the same way that a Ferrari is a fast, horseless carriage — a technically correct description, but one that is highly misleading. Why do you call these devices smartphones — well, think of where you encountered your first smartphone.

Most people's first experience with a smartphone was when they upgraded from a regular cellphone — and they obtained the new devices from cellphone providers who (likely correctly) reasoned that people would be more likely to upgrade their cellphone to "smartphones" than to replace their cellphones with "pocket computers that have a phone app."

Locating Your Vulnerable Data

Review what data your devices house. Think of the worst-case consequences if an unauthorized person obtained your data or it leaked to the public on the Internet.

No list of items to search for can possibly cover all possible scenarios, but here are some things to think about. Do you have

- » Private photos and videos
- » Recordings of your voice
- » Images of your handwriting (especially of your signature)
- » Financial records
- » Medical records
- » School-related documents
- » Password lists
- » Repositories of digital keys
- » Documents containing:
- » Credit card numbers

- » SSNs/EINs/taxpayer identification numbers
- » Maiden names
- » Codes to physical locks or other passcodes
- » Correspondence with the IRS and state tax authorities
- » Lawsuit-related information
- » Employment-related information
- » Mother's maiden name
- » Birth dates
- » Passport numbers
- » Driver's license numbers
- » Information about your vehicles
- » Information about your former addresses
- » Biometric data (fingerprints, retina scan, facial geometry, keyboard dynamics, and so on)

These items will need to be protected against cyberthreats, as described in multiple later chapters. But, the data stores in which they reside also need to be protected physically, as described in the next section.

Creating and Executing a Physical Security Plan

In order to adequately physically protect your technology and data, you should not attempt to simply deploy various security controls on an ad hoc basis. Rather, it is far better to develop and implement a physical security plan — doing so, will help you avoid making costly mistakes.

In most cases, physically securing computing systems relies on applying a well-known established principal of crime prevention, known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTD), that states that you can reduce the likelihood of certain crimes being committed if you

create a physical environment that allows legitimate users to feel secure, but makes ill-doers unconformable with actually carrying out any planned problematic activities.

Understanding this high-level concept can help you think about ways to keep your own systems and data safe.

Three components of Crime Prevention Through Design as they apply in general to preventing crime include access control, surveillance, and marking:

- » **Access control:** Limiting access to authorized parties, by using fences, monitored entrances and exits, proper landscaping, and so on makes it harder for criminals to penetrate a building or other facility, and increases the risk to crooks that they will be noticed, thus discouraging potential criminals from actually carrying out crimes.
- » **Surveillance:** Criminals often avoid committing crimes that are likely to be seen and recorded; as such, they gravitate away from environments that they know are well-watched. Cameras, guards, and motion-sensitive-lighting all discourage crime.
- » **Marking:** Criminals tend to avoid areas that are clearly marked as belonging to someone else — for example, through the use of fences and signs — as they do not want to stand out and be easily noticeable when committing crimes. Likewise, they avoid environments in which authorized parties are marked. Consider, for example, that an unauthorized person not wearing a post office uniform while walking around in an area marked “US Postal Service Employees Only” is far more likely to be noticed and stopped than someone else walking in a similar unmarked environment belonging to a business that does not require uniforms.



TIP You can apply these same principles in your home — for example, placing a computer in a parent's home office sends a message to children, babysitters, and guests that the device is off limits, far stronger than the message would be delivered if the same machine were located in a family room or den. Likewise, a curious babysitter or houseguest is far less likely to go into one's private home office without permission after being told not to if he/she is aware that the area is monitored with cameras.

You know your own environment. By applying these concepts you can improve the likelihood that unauthorized parties will not attempt to gain unauthorized access to your computers and data.

Implementing Physical Security

You can use many techniques and technologies to help secure an object or facility.

How much physical security you implement for a device depends heavily on the purpose for which it is being used and what types of information it houses. (For more information on inventorying your devices, see the section "[Taking Inventory](#)," earlier in this chapter.)

Here are some examples of methods of securing devices — based on your tolerance level for risk and your budget, you may choose variants of all, some, or none of these techniques:

- » **Locks:** For example, store devices in a locked room, with access to the room provided to only those people who need to use the device. In some environments, you may be able to record or monitor all entrances and exits from the room. Another popular variant is to store laptops in a safe located in one's master bedroom or home office when the computers are not in use.

- » **Video cameras:** For example, consider having a video camera focused on the devices to see who accesses them and when they do so.
- » **Security guards:** Obviously, security guards are not a practical solution in most home environments, but human defenders do have a time and place. For example, consider posting guards inside the room where the device is located, outside the room, in halls around the entrance to the room, outside the building, and outside the perimeter fence.
- » **Alarms:** Alarms not only serve as a reactive force that scare away criminals who actually attempt to enter a home or office, they also serve as a strong deterrent, pushing many opportunistic evildoers to “look elsewhere” and target someone else.
- » **Perimeter security:** Traffic posts prevent people from crashing cars into a facility, and proper fences and walls prevent people from approaching a home or office building. You should note that most experts believe that a fence under 8 feet tall does not provide any significant security value when it comes to potential human intruders.
- » **Lighting:** Criminals tend to avoid well-lit places. Motion-triggered lighting is even more of a deterrent than static lighting. When lights go on suddenly, people in the area are more likely to turn and look at what just happened — and see the criminal just as he or she is illuminated.
- » **Environmental risk mitigation:** If you’re in an area that is likely to be hit by floods, for example, ensure that computing resources are stationed somewhere not likely to flood. If such advice seems obvious, consider that residents of northern New Jersey lost telephone service after a storm in the late 1990s when telephone switching equipment flooded — because it was situated in the basement of a building standing next to a river. Having proper defenses against fires is another critical element of environmental risk mitigation.

- » **Backup power and contingencies for power failures:** Power failures impact not only your computers, but, many security systems as well.
- » **Contingencies during renovations and other construction, and so forth:** The risks to data and computers during home renovations are often overlooked. Leaving your cellphone unattended when workers are routinely entering and exiting your home, for example, can be a recipe for a stolen device and/or the compromise of data on the device.
- » **Risks from backups:** Remember to protect backups of data with the same security precautions as you do the original copies of the data. Spending time and money protecting a computer with a safe and cameras because of the data on its hard drive, for example, is silly if you leave backups of that same data on portable hard drives stored on a family room shelf in plain sight of anyone visiting your home.

Of course, you should not consider the preceding list to be comprehensive. But, if you think about how you can apply each of these items to help keep your devices safe within the context of a CPTD approach, you will likely benefit from much greater odds against an “unfortunate incident” occurring than if you do not. (For more on CPTD, see the earlier section “[Creating and Executing a Physical Security Plan.](#)”)

Security for Mobile Devices



TIP Of course, mobile devices — that is, computers, tablets, smartphones, and other electronic devices that are moved from location to location on a regular basis — pose additional risks because these devices can be easily lost or stolen. As such, when it comes to mobile devices, one simple, yet critically important, physical security principle should be added: Keep your devices in sight or locked up.

Such advice may sound obvious; sadly, however, a tremendous number of devices are stolen each year when left unattended, so you can be sure that the advice is either not obvious or not followed — and, in either case, you want to internalize it and follow it.

In addition to watching over your phone, tablet, or laptop, you should enable location broadcasting, remotely triggerable alarms, and remote wipe — all of which can be invaluable at quickly reducing the risk posed if the device is lost or stolen. Some devices even offer a feature to photograph or video record anyone using a mobile device after the user flags it as stolen — which can not only help you locate the device, but also catch any thieves involved in stealing it.

Realizing That Insiders Pose the Greatest Risks

According to most experts, the majority of information-security incidents involve insider threats — meaning that the biggest risk to businesses are their employees. Likewise, if you share a home computer with family members who are less cyber-aware, they may pose the greatest risk to your cybersecurity. You may take great care of your machine, but if your teen downloads malware-infected software onto the device, you may be in for a nasty surprise.

One critical rule from “the old days” that rings true today — even though it is often dismissed as outdated due to the use of technologies

such as encryption — is that anyone who can physically access a computer may be able to access the data on that computer. This rule is true even if encryption is utilized, for at least two reasons: Someone who accesses your device may not be able to access your data, but he or she can certainly destroy it and may even be able to access it due to one or more of the following reasons:

- » You may not have set up the encryption properly.
- » Your machine may have an exploitable vulnerability.
- » The encryption software may have a bug in it that undermines its ability to properly protect your secrets.
- » Someone may have obtained the password to decrypt.
- » Someone may be willing to copy your data and wait until computers are powerful enough to break your encryption.



WARNING Here is the bottom line: If you do not want people to access data, not only should you secure it logically (for example, with encryption), you should also secure it physically in order to prevent them from obtaining a copy of the data, even in encrypted form.

On that note, if your computer contains files that you do not want your children to have access to, do not share your computer with your children.

Do not rely solely on digital security. Utilize a physical defense. While it is true that crafty, skilled children may be able to hack your computer across your LAN, the risks of such an attack occurring are minuscule compared with the temptation of a curious child who is actually using your computer. That said, ideally you should keep your most sensitive data and machines on a network physically isolated from the one that your children use.

HUMANS ALWAYS COME FIRST

As you ponder how to physically secure your data, keep in mind one cardinal rule when it comes to safety and security: Humans always come first — with no exceptions.

If a fire occurs in a home, for example, saving the residents is the top priority with no close second. You should never enter a dangerous environment in order to retrieve computers or backup drives. Make sure to store some backups offsite and/or keep some in a fire- and water-resistant safe. You need to assume that in many environmental disasters, your systems and data may need to be “sheltered in place” until after the disaster passes.

Part 3

Protecting Yourself from Yourself

IN THIS PART ...

Understand how to secure your accounts.

Learn all about passwords, including how to create strong passwords that you can remember.

Protect yourself and your loved ones against social engineering.

Chapter 6

Securing Your Accounts

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding that you're a target
 - » Securing your various accounts from human error
-

The weakest link in the cybersecurity chain is almost always people, and the greatest threat to your own cybersecurity is likely yourself and the members of your family.

As such, all the technology and technical knowledge in the world won't deliver much value if you don't also address various human shortcomings.

Realizing That You're a Target

Perhaps the most significant first step in securing yourself digitally is to understand that you're a target and that nefarious parties have the desire to breach your computer systems, electronically accessible accounts, and anything else they can get their hands on.

Even if you already realize that you're a target, make sure to fully internalize such a notion. People who truly believe that criminals want to breach their computers and phones act differently than people who do not fully appreciate this reality and whose lack of skepticism sometimes leads them into trouble.



WARNING Because your family members can also impact your digital security, they also need to be aware that they are a potential targets. If your children take unwise risks online, they may inadvertently

inflict harm not only on themselves, but upon you and other members of the family as well. In some cases, attackers have managed to attack people’s employers via remote connections that were compromised because children misused computers on the same networks as computers that the employees were using for working remotely.

The threat posed by such attacks is usually not that a criminal will directly steal someone’s money or data, but rather that some party will seek to harm the target in some other manner — a manner that may ultimately translate into some form of financial, military, political, or other benefit to the attacker and (potentially) damage of some sort to the victim.

Securing Your External Accounts

[Chapter 4](#) discusses how you can acquire your own technology products. But using these products isn’t enough to keep you cybersecure as you, no doubt, have digital data of significant value that is stored outside of your own physical possession — that is, outside of data systems and data stores under your control.

In fact, data about every person living in the western world today is likely stored on computer systems belonging to many businesses, organizations, and governmental agencies. Sometimes those systems reside within the facilities of the organizations to which they belong, sometimes they’re located at shared data centers, and, sometimes the systems themselves are virtual machines rented from a third-party provider. Additionally, some such data may reside in cloud-based systems offered by a third party.

Such data can be broken down and divided into many different categories, depending on which aspects of it a person is interested in. One way of examining the data for the purposes of discovering how to secure it, for example, is to group it according to the following scheme:

- » Accounts, and the data within them, that a user established and controls
- » Data belonging to organizations that a user has willingly and knowingly interacted with, but the user has no control over the data
- » Data in the possession of organizations that the user has never knowingly established a relationship with

Addressing the risks of each type of data requires a different strategy.

Securing Data Associated with User Accounts

When you bank online, shop online, or even browse the web, you provide all sorts of data to the parties that you interact with.

When you establish and maintain an account with a bank, store, social media provider, or other online party, you gain control over significant amounts of data related to yourself that the party maintains on your behalf. Obviously, you can't fully control the security of that data because the data is not in your possession. That said, you obviously also have a strong interest in protecting that data — and, in not undermining the protections for the data that the party hosting the account has established.

While every situation and account has its unique attributes, certain strategies can help keep your data secure at third parties. Obviously, not all the ideas in the following sections apply to every situation, but applying the appropriate items from the menu to your various accounts and online behavior can dramatically improve your odds of remaining cybersecure.

Conduct business with reputable parties

There is nothing wrong with supporting small businesses — in fact, doing so is quite admirable. (It is also true that many large firms have suffered serious security breaches.) But if you search for the latest

electronic gizmo, for example, and one store that you have never heard of is offering it at a substantial discount from the prices offered at all well-known stores, be wary. There may be a legitimate reason for the discount — or there may be a scam in the works.



WARNING Always check the websites of stores that you're conducting business with to see whether something looks off — and beware if it does.

Use official apps and websites

Clones of official apps have been found in various app stores. If you install a banking, credit card, or shopping app for a particular company, make sure that you install the official app and not some malicious impersonator. Install apps only from reputable app stores, such as Google Play, Amazon AppStore, and Apple App Store.

Don't install software from untrusted parties

Malware that infects a computer can capture sensitive information from both other programs and web sessions running on the device. If a website is offering free copies of movies, software, or other items that normally cost money, not only may the offerings be stolen copies, but ask yourself how the operator is making money — it may be by distributing malware.

Don't root your phone

You may be tempted to *root your phone* — a process that allows you greater control over your device — but doing so undermines various security capabilities of the device and may allow malware to capture sensitive information from other apps on the device, leading to account compromises.

Don't provide unnecessary sensitive information

Don't provide private information to anyone who doesn't need that data. For example, don't give your Social Security number to any online

stores or doctors because they have no need for it.



REMEMBER Keep in mind that the less information about you that a specific party has, the less data that can be compromised, and correlated, in case of a breach.

Use payment services that eliminate the need to share credit card numbers with vendors

Services like PayPal, Samsung Pay, Apple Pay, and so on let you make online payments without having to give vendors your actual credit card number. If a vendor is breached, the information about your account that is likely to be stolen is significantly less likely to lead to fraud (and, perhaps, even various forms of identity theft) than if actual credit card data were stored at the vendor. Moreover, major payment sites have armies of skilled information security professionals working to keep them safe that vendors accepting such payments can rarely, if ever, match.

Use one-time, virtual credit card numbers when appropriate

Some financial institutions allow you to use an app (or website) to create disposable, one-time *virtual credit card numbers* that allow you to make a charge to a real credit card account (associated with the virtual number) without having to give the respective merchant your real credit card number. As seen in [Figure 6-1](#), some virtual credit card systems also allow you to specify the maximum allowable charge size on a particular virtual card number at a figure much lower than it would be on the real corresponding card.

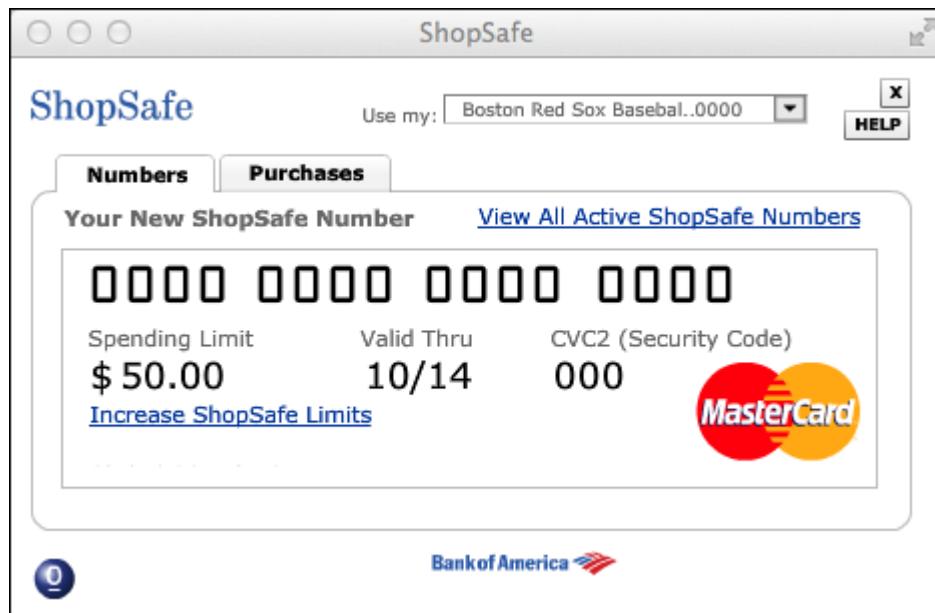


FIGURE 6-1: A (slightly edited image of) a one-time credit card number generator.

While creating one-time numbers takes time and effort and may be overkill when doing repeat deals with a reputable vendor in whose information-security practices you have confidence, virtual credit card numbers do offer benefits for defending against potential fraud and may be appropriately used when dealing with less familiar parties.

Besides minimizing the risk to yourself if a vendor turns out to be corrupt, virtual credit card numbers offer other security benefits. If criminals hack a vendor and steal your virtual credit card number that was previously used, not only can they not make charges with it, their attempts to do so may even help law enforcement track them down, as well as help forensics teams identify the source of the credit card number data leak.

Monitor your accounts

Regularly checking for any unrecognized activities on your payment, banking, and shopping accounts is a good idea.



TIP Ideally, do this check by not only looking at online transaction logs, but also by checking relevant monthly statements (no matter

the delivery method) for anything that does not belong.

Report suspicious activity ASAP



REMEMBER The faster a potential fraud is reported to the parties responsible for addressing it, the greater the chance of reversing it and preventing further abuse of whatever materials were abused in order to commit the first act of fraud. Also, the sooner the fraud is reported, the greater the chance of catching the parties committing it.

Employ a proper password strategy

While conventional wisdom may be to require complex passwords for all systems, such a password strategy fails in practice. Be sure to implement a proper password strategy. For more on choosing passwords, see [Chapter 7](#).

Utilize multifactor authentication

Multifactor authentication means authentication that requires a user to authenticate using two or more of the following methods:

- » Something that the user knows, such as a password
- » Something that the user is, such as a fingerprint
- » Something that the user has, such as a hardware token

For extremely sensitive systems, you should use forms of authentication that are stronger than passwords alone. The following forms of authentication all have their places:

- » **Biometrics**, which means using measurements of various human characteristics to identify people. Fingerprints, voiceprints, iris scans, the speed at which people type different characters on a keyboard, and the like are all examples of biometrics.

- » **Digital certificates**, which effectively prove to a system that a particular public key represents the presenter of the certificate. If the presenter of the certificate is able to decrypt messages encrypted with the public key in the certificate, it means that the presenter possesses the corresponding private key, which only the legitimate owner should have.
- » **One-time passwords**, or one-time tokens, generated by apps or sent via SMS to your cellphone.
- » **Hardware tokens**, which are typically small electronic devices that either plug into a USB port, display a number that changes every minute or so, or allow users to enter a challenge number and receive a corresponding response number back. Today, smartphone apps perform such functions, allowing, at least theoretically, the smartphone to assume the role of a hardware token. [Figure 6-2](#) shows you an example of using such an app to generate a one-time code for logging into Snapchat. (Note that smartphones can suffer from all sorts of security vulnerabilities that hardware tokens can't suffer from, so hardware tokens are still likely more appropriate for certain high-risk situations.)



- » **TIP** **Knowledge-based authentication**, which is based on real knowledge, not simply answering questions with small numbers of possible answers that are often guessable like “What color was your first car?” Note that technically speaking, adding knowledge-based authentication questions to password authentication doesn’t create multifactor authentication since both the password and the knowledge-based answer are examples of things that a user knows. However, doing so certainly does improve security when the questions are chosen properly.

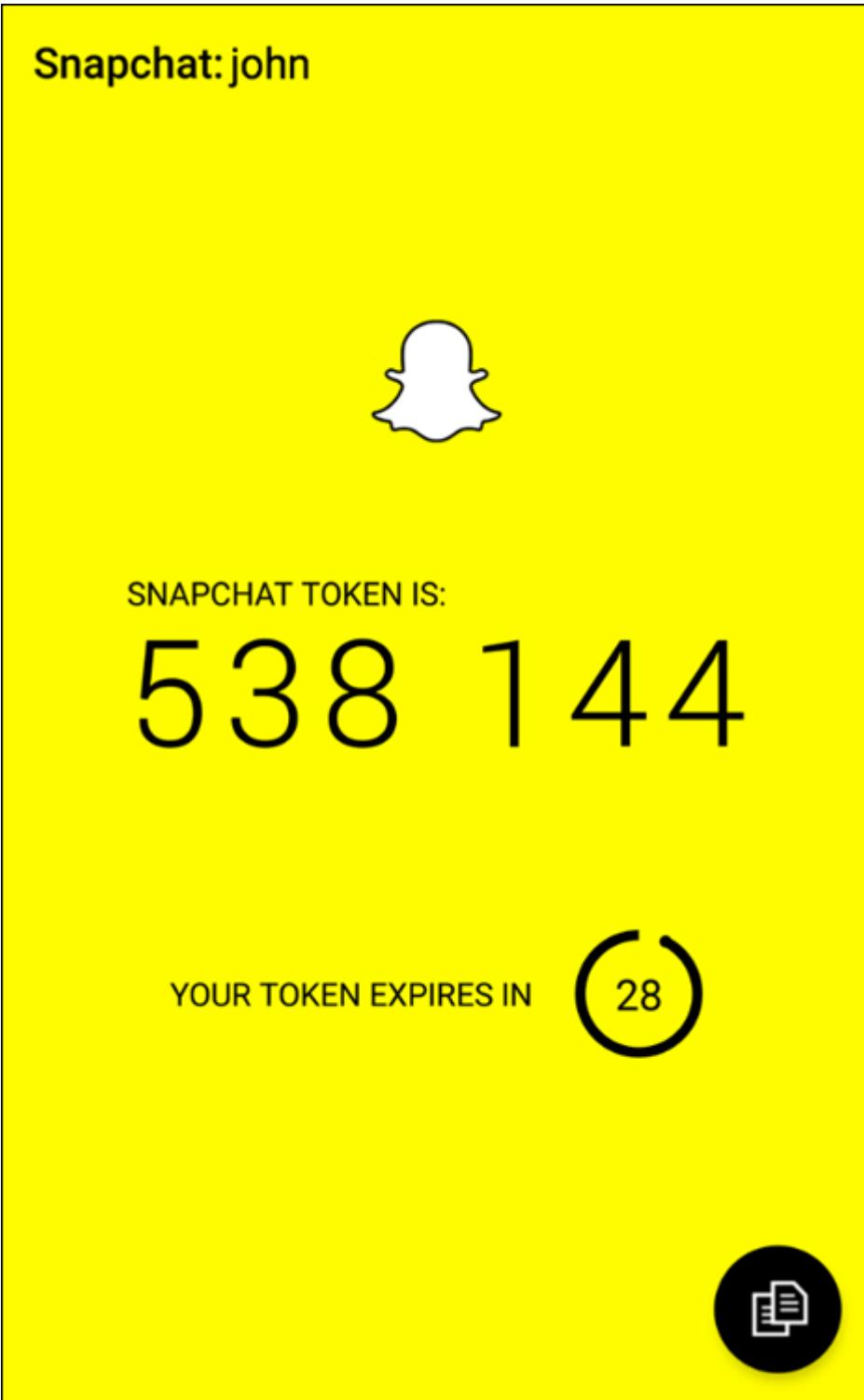


FIGURE 6-2: One-time password for Snapchat generated by the app Authy — an example of an app-generated multifactor authentication token.

Most financial institutions, social media companies, and major online retailers offer multifactor authentication — use it.

Also, note that while sending one-time passwords to users' smartphones via text messages theoretically verifies that a person logging in possesses the smartphone that the user is supposed to possess (something that the user has), various vulnerabilities undermine that supposition. It is possible, for example, for a criminal to intercept text messages even without possessing the phone.

Log out when you're finished

Don't rely on automatic timeouts, closing the browser, or shutting down a computer to log you out of accounts. Log out every time you're finished.

Don't leave yourself logged in between sessions unless you're on a device that you know with — as close as possible to — certainty will remain secure.

Use your own computer or phone

You don't know how well someone else has secured his or her device — it may have malware on it that can capture your passwords and other sensitive information or hijack sessions and perform all sorts of nefarious activities.

Furthermore, despite the fact that doing so is severely problematic, some applications and websites — to this day — cache data on endpoints that are used for accessing them. You don't want to leave other people souvenirs of your sensitive sessions.

Lock your computer

Lock any computer that you use for accessing sensitive accounts and keep it physically secure as well.

Use a separate, dedicated computer for sensitive tasks

Consider purchasing a special computer that you use for online banking and other sensitive tasks. For many people, a second computer isn't practical, but if it is, having such a machine — on which you never read

email, access social media, browse the web, and so on — offers security benefits.

Use a separate, dedicated browser for sensitive web-based tasks

If you can't obtain a separate computer, at least use a separate browser for sensitive tasks. Don't use the same browser that you use for reading the news, checking out blog posts, and most other activities.

Secure your access devices

Every phone, laptop, tablet, and desktop used for accessing secure systems should have security software on it, and that security software should be configured to regularly scan applications when they're added, as well as to run periodic general scans (see [Figure 6-3](#)). Also, make sure to keep that software up to date — most antivirus technology products perform far better against newer strains of malware when they're kept up to date than when they're not.

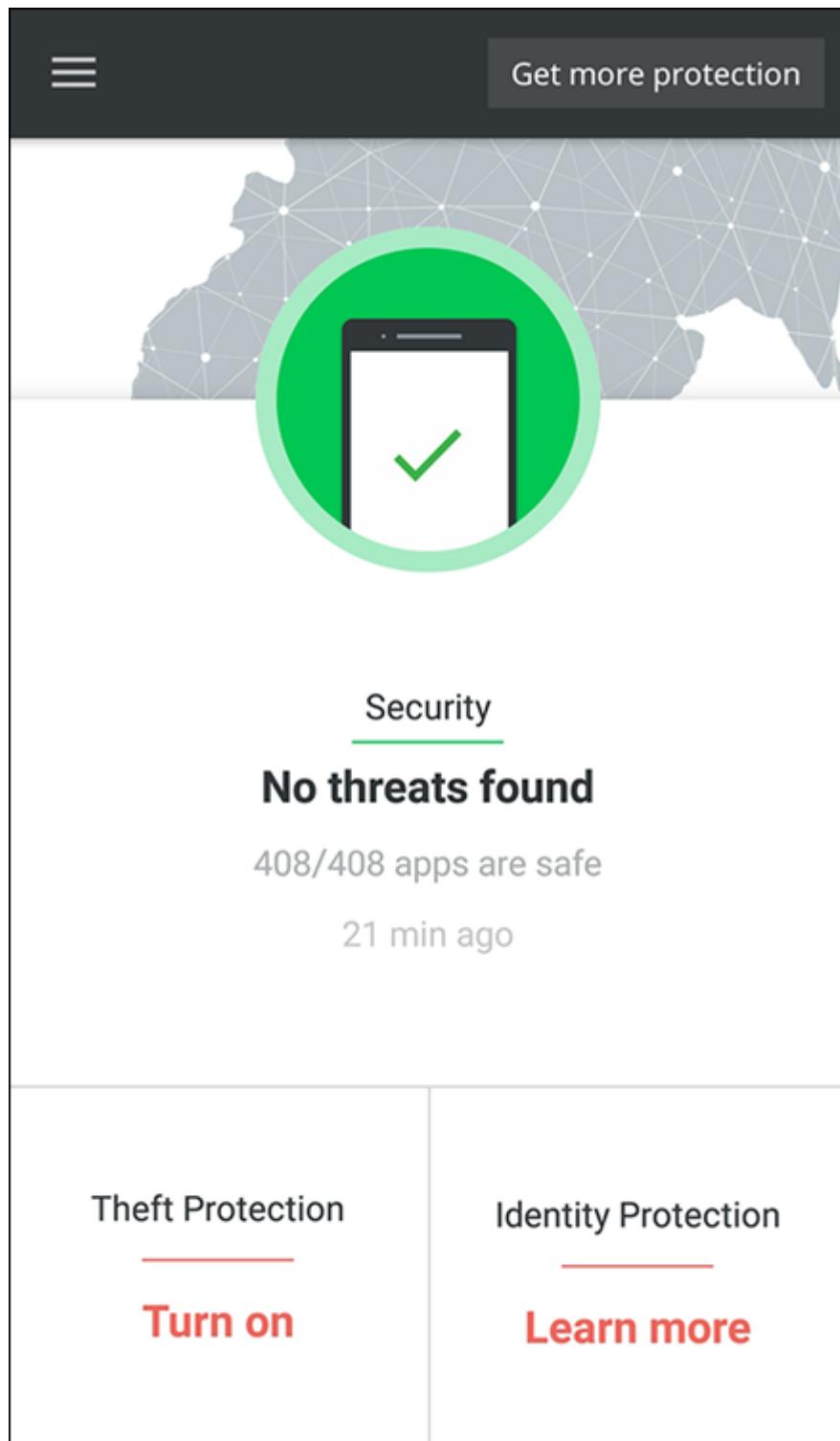


FIGURE 6-3: The results of a periodic scan of a phone's installed apps for malware.

Keep your devices up to date

Besides keeping your security software up to date, be sure to install operating system and program updates to reduce your exposure to vulnerabilities. Windows AutoUpdate and its equivalent on other platforms can simplify this task for you, as shown in [Figure 6-4](#).

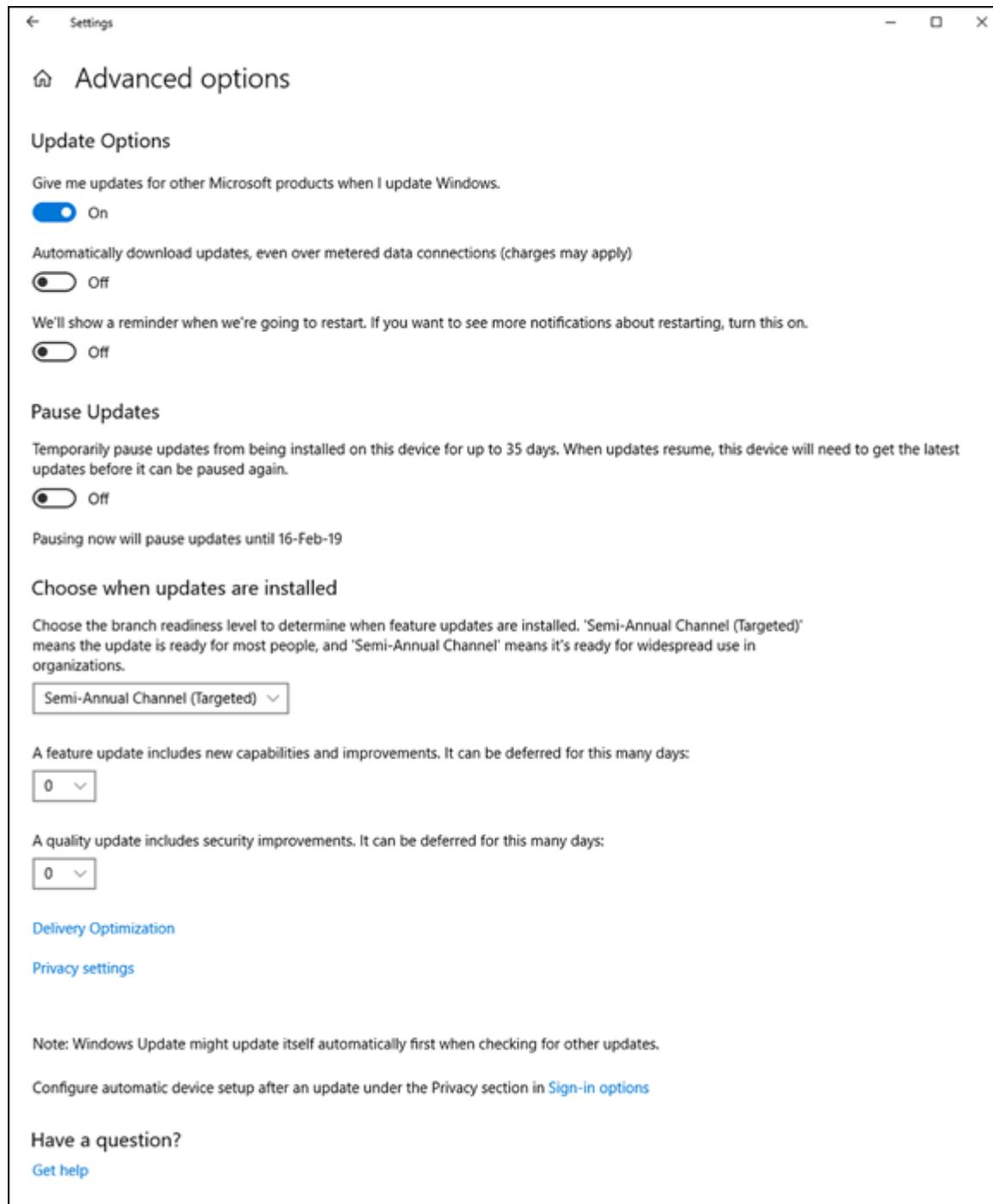


FIGURE 6-4: The AutoUpdate settings page in Windows 10.

Don't perform sensitive tasks over public Wi-Fi

If you must perform a sensitive task while you're in a location where you don't have access to a secure, private network, do what you need to do over the cellular system, not over public Wi-Fi. Public Wi-Fi simply poses too many risks. (To find out more about how to use public Wi-Fi safely, please see [Chapter 20](#).)

Never use public Wi-Fi for any purpose in high-risky places

Don't connect any device from which you plan to perform sensitive tasks to a Wi-Fi network in areas that are prone to *digital poisoning* — that is, to the hacking of, or distribution of malware, to devices that connect to a network.

Hacker conferences and certain countries, such as China, that are known for performing cyberespionage are examples of areas that are likely to experience digital poisoning. Many cybersecurity professionals recommend keeping your primary computer and phone off and using a separate computer and phone when working in such environments.

Access your accounts only when you're in a safe location

Even if you're using a private network, don't type passwords to sensitive systems or perform other sensitive tasks while in a location where people can easily watch what you type and see your screen.

Set appropriate limits

Various online venues let you set limits — for example, how much money can be transferred out of a bank account, the largest charge that can be made on a credit card with the card not physically present (as in the case of online purchases), or the maximum amount of goods that you can purchase in one day.



TIP Set these limits. Not only will they limit the damage if a criminal does breach your account, but in some cases, they may trigger fraud alerts and prevent theft altogether.

Use alerts

If your bank, credit card provider, or a store that you frequent offers the ability to set up text or email alerts, you should seriously consider taking advantage of those services.

Theoretically, it is ideal to have the issuer send you an alert every time activity occurs on your account. From a practical standpoint, however, if doing so would overwhelm you and cause you to ignore all the messages (as is the case for most people), consider asking to be notified when transactions are made over a certain dollar amount (which may be able to be set to different thresholds for different stores or accounts) or otherwise appear to the issuer to be potentially fraudulent.

Periodically check access device lists

Some websites and apps — especially those of financial institutions — allow you to check the list of devices that have accessed your account. Checking this list each time that you log in can help you identify potential security problems quickly.

Check last login info

After you log in to some websites and via some apps — especially those of financial institutions — you may be shown information as to when and from where you last successfully logged in prior to the current session. Whenever any entity shows you such information, take a quick glance. If something is amiss and a criminal recently logged in while pretending to be you, it may stand out like a sore thumb.

Respond appropriately to any fraud alerts

If you receive a phone call from a bank, credit card company, or store about potential fraud on your account, respond quickly. But do not do so

by speaking with the party who called you. Instead, contact the outlet at a known valid number that is advertised on its website.

Never send any sensitive information over an unencrypted connection

When you access websites, look for the padlock icon (see [Figure 6-5](#)), indicating that encrypted HTTPS is being used. Today, HTTPS is ubiquitous; even many websites that do not ask users to submit sensitive data utilize it.

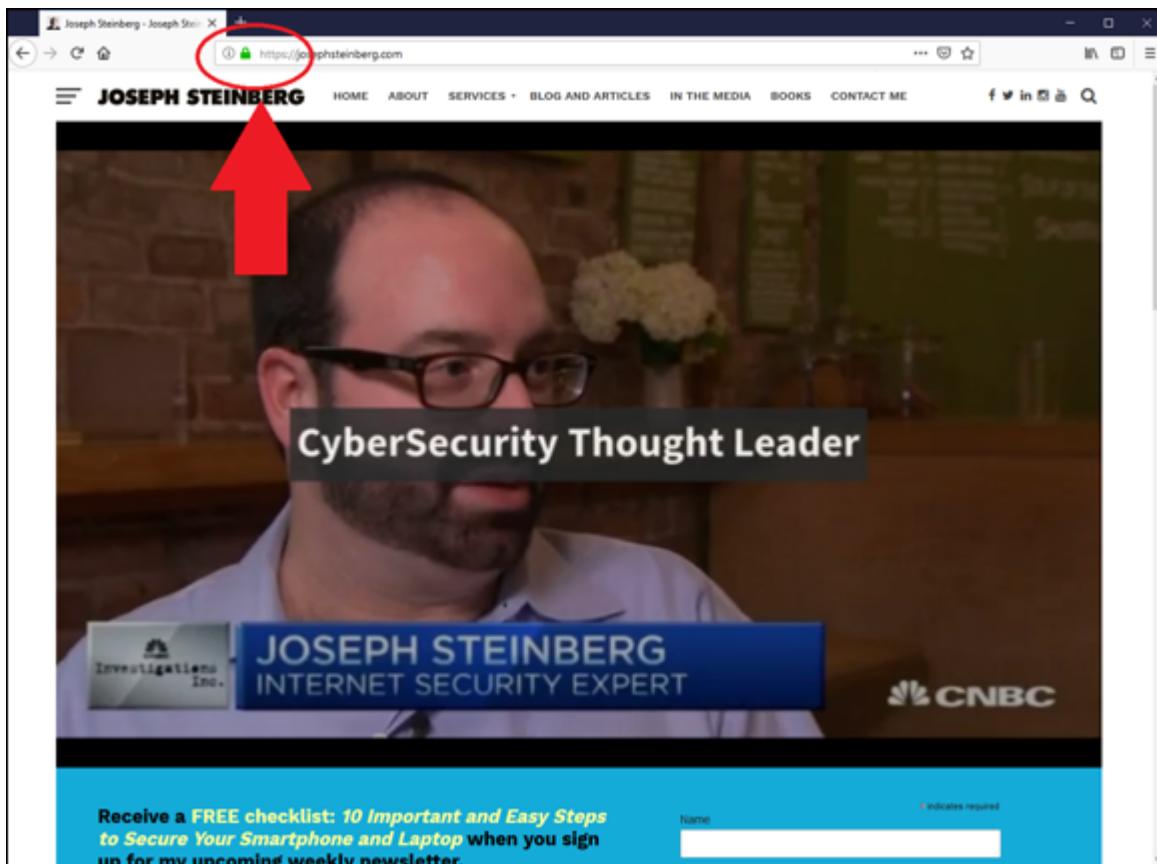


FIGURE 6-5: A secure website.

If you don't see the icon, unencrypted HTTP is being used. In such a case, don't provide sensitive information or log in.



TIP The lack of a padlock on a site that is prompting for a login and password or handling financial transactions is a huge red flag that something is seriously amiss. However, contrary to what you've likely heard in the past, the presence of the lock doesn't necessarily mean that the site is safe.

Beware of social engineering attacks

In the context of cybersecurity, social engineering refers to the psychological manipulation by cyberattackers of their intended victims into performing actions that without such manipulation the targets would not perform or into divulging confidential information that they otherwise would not divulge.

To help prevent yourself from falling prey to social engineering attacks, consider any and all emails, text messages, phone calls, or social media communications from all banks, credit card companies, healthcare providers, stores, and so on to be potentially fraudulent.



WARNING Never click on links in any such correspondence. Always connect with such parties by entering the URL in the URL bar of the web browser.

For more on social engineering attack prevention, see [Chapter 8](#).

Establish voice login passwords

Online access isn't the only path that a criminal can use to breach your accounts. Many crooks do reconnaissance online and subsequently social engineer their ways into people's accounts using old-fashioned phone calls to the relevant customer service departments at the target organizations.



TIP To protect yourself and your accounts, establish voice login passwords for your accounts whenever possible — that is, set up passwords that must be given to customer service personnel in order for them to be able to provide any information from your accounts or to make changes to them. Many companies offer this capability, but relatively few people actually use it.

Protect your cellphone number

If you use strong authentication via text messages, ideally set up a forwarding phone number to your cellphone and use that number when giving out your cell number. Doing so reduces the chances that criminals will be able to intercept one-time passwords that are sent to your phone and also diminishes the chances of various other attacks succeeding.

For example, Google Voice, shown in [Figure 6-6](#), allows you to establish a new phone number that forwards to your cellphone so that you can give out a number other than your real cellphone number and reserve the real number for use within the authentication process.

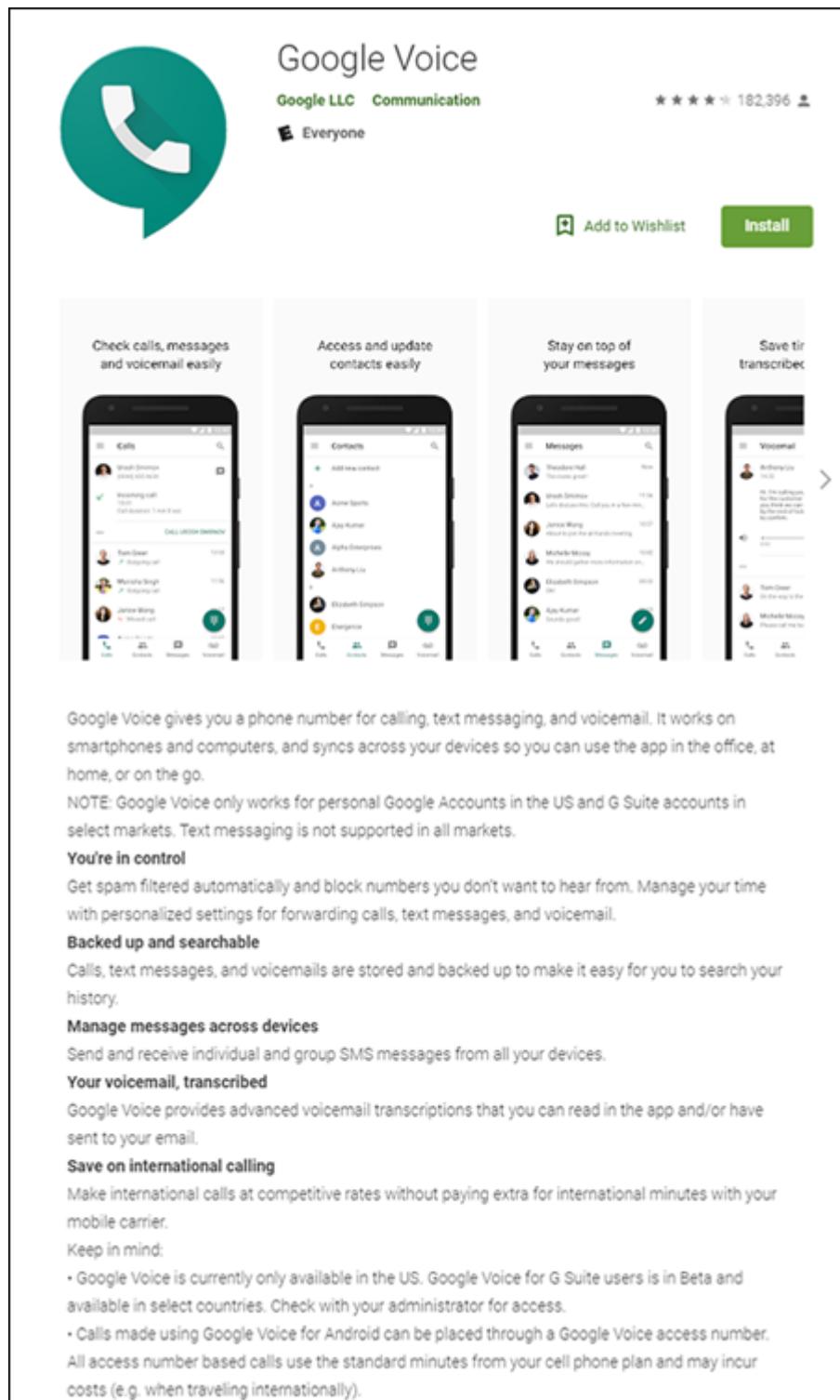


FIGURE 6-6: The Google Voice app as made available in the Google Play Store.

Don't click on links in emails or text messages

Clicking on links is one of the primary ways that people get diverted to fraudulent websites.

For example, I recently received an email message that contained a link. If I had clicked the link in the message shown in [Figure 6-7](#), I would have been brought to a phony LinkedIn login page that collects LinkedIn username and password combinations and provides them to criminals.

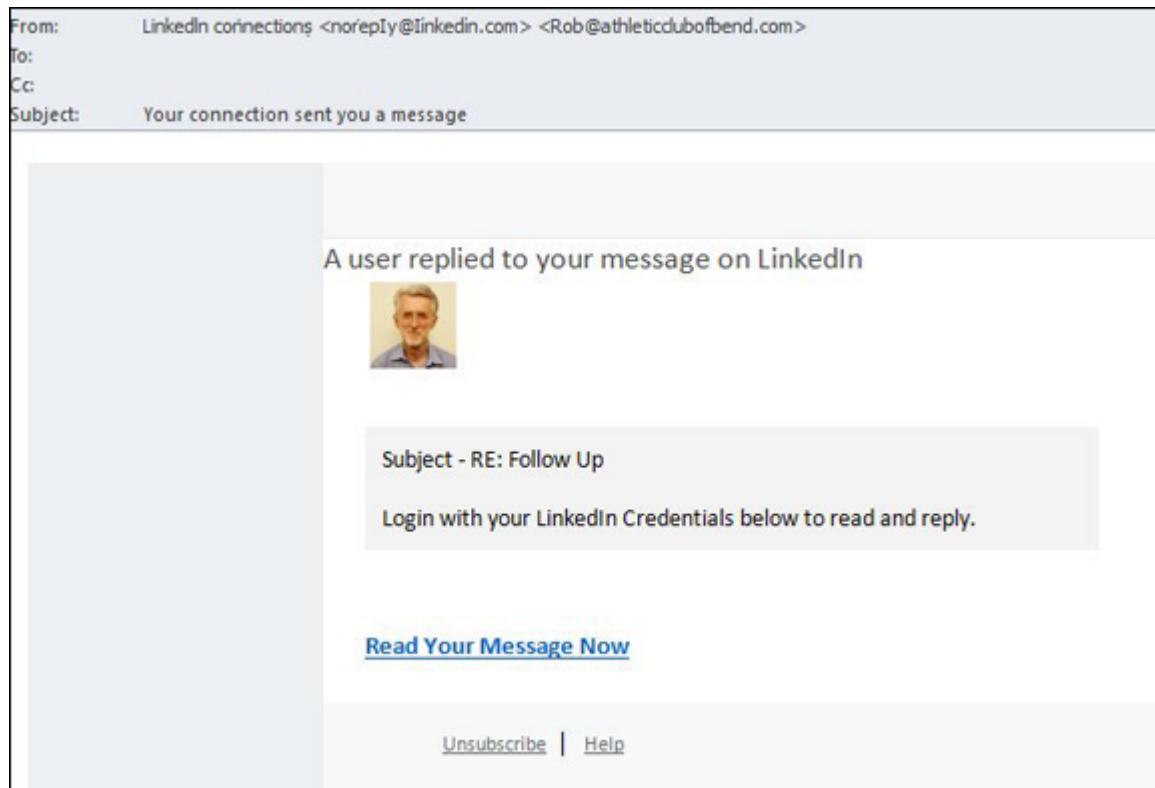


FIGURE 6-7: Email with a link to a phony page.

Don't overshare on social media

You don't want to provide criminals with the answers to challenge questions that are being used to protect your account or offer them information that they can use to social engineer their way into your accounts. See [Chapter 8](#) for more on preventing social engineering.

Pay attention to privacy policies

Understand what a site means if it says that it is going to share your data with third parties or sell your data to others.

Securing Data with Parties That You've Interacted With

When you interact online with a party, not all the data is under your control. If you browse a website with typical web browser settings, that site may track your activity. Because many sites syndicate content from third parties — for example from advertising networks — sites may even be able to track your behavior on other sites.

If you have an account on any sites that do such tracking and log in, all the sites utilizing the syndicated content may know your true identity and plenty of information about you — even though you never told them anything about yourself. Even if you don't have such an account or don't log in, profiles of your behavior may be established and used for marketing purposes, even without knowing who you are. (Of course, if you ever log in in the future to any site using the network, all the sites with the profiles may correlate them to your true identity.)

It is far more difficult to protect data about you that is in the possession of third parties but that is not under your control than it is to protect data in your accounts. That does not mean, however, that you're powerless. (Ironically, and sadly, most owners of such data likely do a better job protecting data about people than do the people themselves.)



TIP Besides employing the strategies in the previous section, you may want to browse in private sessions. For example, by using a Tor browser — which, as shown in [Figure 6-8](#), automatically routes all your Internet traffic through computers around the world before sending it to its destination — you make it difficult for third parties to track you. As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), the Tor browser bundle is free and comes with all sorts of privacy-related features enabled, including blocking cookies and canvas fingerprinting, an advanced form of tracking devices.

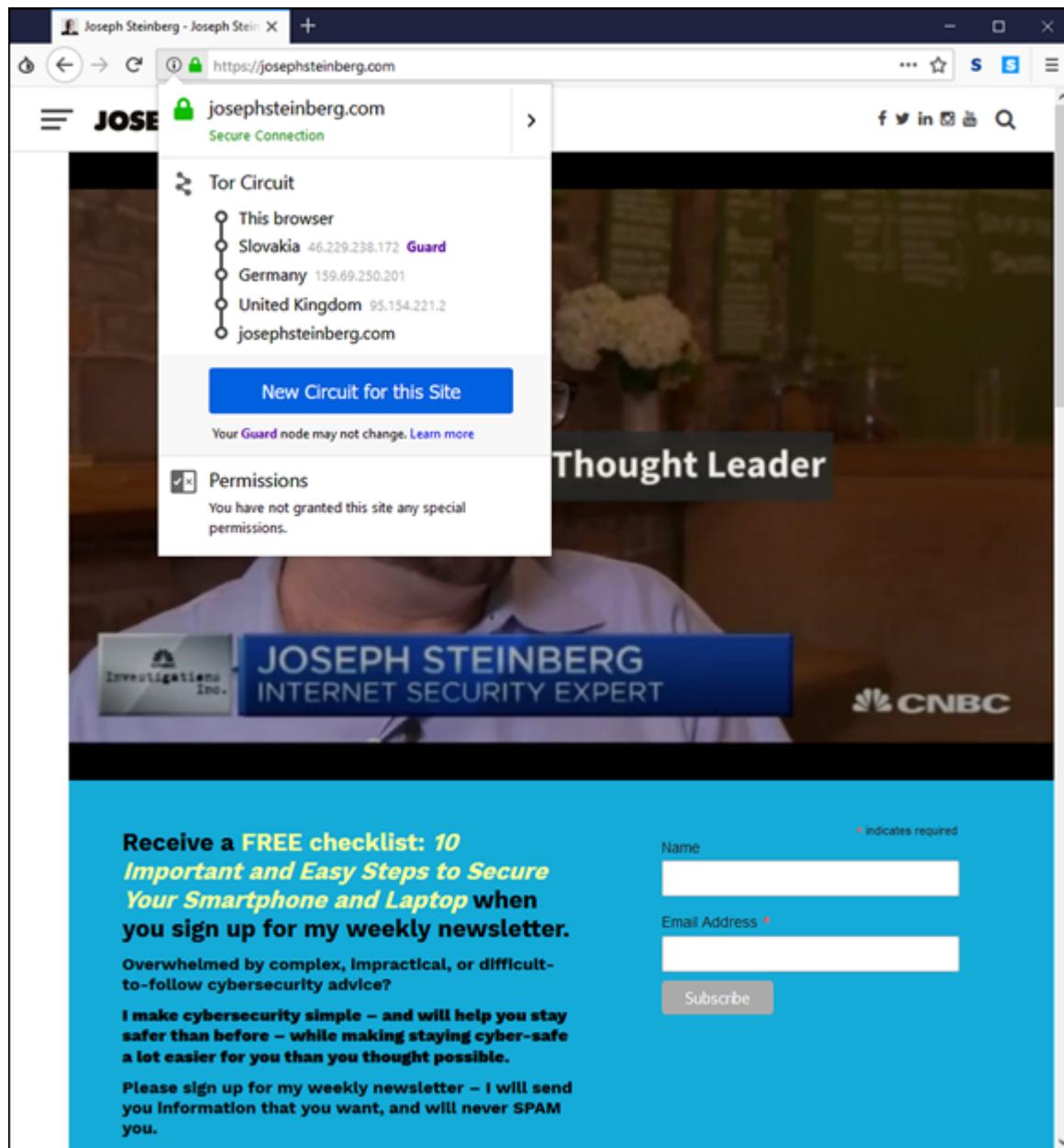


FIGURE 6-8: The author’s website as seen in a Tor browser, with the Tor circuit information button clicked so as to show how Tor is hiding the user’s point of origin. The image was generated with the Tor browser running on a computer in New Jersey, but, because of Tor’s security features, appears to the web server as if it is in the United Kingdom.

If Tor seems complicated, you can also utilize a reputable VPN service for similar purposes.

By using browsing technology that makes it harder for sites to track you, they are less likely to establish as detailed profiles about you — and the less data about you that they have, the less data about you that can be

stolen. Besides, you may not want those parties to build profiles about you in the first place.



WARNING One technology that, despite its name, does not prevent tracking at anywhere near the level that do Tor or VPNs is the private mode offered by most web browsers. Unfortunately, despite its name, the private mode suffers from multiple serious weaknesses in this regard and does not come close to ensuring privacy.

Securing Data at Parties That You Haven't Interacted With

Numerous entities likely maintain significant amounts of data about you, despite the fact that you've never knowingly interacted with them or otherwise authorized them to maintain such information.

For example, at least one major social media service builds de facto profiles for people who don't have accounts with the service, but who have been mentioned by others or who have interacted with sites that utilize various social widgets or other related technologies. The service can then use these profiles for marketing purposes — even, in some cases, without knowing the person's true identity.

Furthermore, various information services that collect information from numerous public databases establish profiles based on such data — containing details that you may not even realize was available to the public.

Some genealogy sites utilize all sorts of public records and also allow people to update the information about other people. This ability can lead to situations in which all sorts of nonpublic information about you may be available to subscribers to the site (or people with free trial subscriptions) without your knowledge or consent. Such sites make

finding people's mothers' maiden names easy, which undermines the authentication scheme used by many organizations.

Besides family tree sites, various professional sites maintain information about folks' professional histories, publications, and so on. And, of course, credit bureaus maintain all sorts of information about your behavior with credit — such information is submitted to them by financial institutions, collection agencies, and so on.

While the Fair Credit Reporting Act may help you manage the information that the bureaus have about you, it can't help you remove negative information that appears in other venues, such as in old newspaper articles that are online. Besides the privacy implications of such, if any information in those articles provides the answer to challenge questions used for authentication, it can create security risks. In such cases, you may want to reach out to the provider of the data, explain the situation, and ask it to remove the data. In some cases, they will cooperate.

In addition, some businesses, such as insurance companies and pharmacies, maintain medical information about people. Typically, individuals have little control over such data.

Of course, this type of data, which isn't under your complete control, can impact you. The bottom line is that many entities likely maintain significant amounts of data about you, even though you have never directly interacted with them.

It is the duty of such organizations to protect their data stores, but, they do not always properly do so. As the Federal Trade Commission notes on its website, a data breach at the credit bureau Equifax, discovered in 2017, exposed the sensitive personal information of 143 million Americans.

And, the reality is, that other than in the cases in which you can manually update records or request that they be updated, you can do little to protect the data in such scenarios.

Chapter 7

Passwords

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Selecting passwords
 - » Discovering how often you need to change passwords — or not
 - » Storing passwords
 - » Finding alternatives to passwords
-

Most people alive today are familiar with the concept of passwords and with their use in the realm of cybersecurity. Yet, there are so many misconceptions about passwords, and misinformation about them has spread like wildfire, often leading to people undermining their own security with poor password practices.

In this chapter, you discover some best practices vis-à-vis passwords. These practices should help you both maximize your own security and maintain reasonable ease of use.

Passwords: The Primary Form of Authentication

Password authentication refers to the process of verifying the identity of a user (whether human or computer process) by asking that user to supply a password — that is, a previously-agreed-upon secret piece of information — that ostensibly the party authenticating would only know if he or she were truly the party who it claimed to be. While the term password implies that the information consists of a single word, today's passwords can include combinations of characters that don't form words in any spoken or written language.

Despite the availability for decades of many other authentication approaches and technologies — many of which offer significant advantages over passwords — passwords remain de facto worldwide standard for authenticating people online. Repeated predictions of the demise of passwords have been proven untrue, and the number of passwords in use grows every day.

Because password authentication is so common and because so many data breaches have resulted in the compromise of password databases, the topic has received significant media attention, with reports often spreading various misleading information. Gaining a proper understanding of the realm of passwords is important if you want to be cybersecure.

Avoiding Simplistic Passwords

Passwords only secure systems if unauthorized parties can't easily guess them.

Criminals often guess passwords by

- » **Guessing common passwords:** It's not a secret that 123456 and password are common passwords — data from recent breaches reveals that they are, in fact, among the most common passwords used on many systems (see the nearby sidebar)! Criminals exploit such sad reality and often attempt to breach accounts by using automated tools that feed systems passwords one at a time from lists of common passwords — and record when they have a hit. Sadly, those hits are often quite numerous.
- » **Launching dictionary attacks:** Because many people choose to use actual English words as passwords, some automated hacker tools simply feed all the words in the dictionary to a system one at a time. As with lists of common passwords, such attacks often achieve numerous hits.
- » **Credential stuffing:** *Credential stuffing* refers to when attackers take lists of usernames and passwords from one site — for example,

from a site that was breached and whose username password database was subsequently posted online — and feed its entries to another system one at a time in order to see whether any of the login credentials from the first system work on the second.

Because many people reuse username and password combinations between systems, credential stuffing is, generally speaking, quite effective.

THE MOST COMMON PASSWORDS OF 2018

Since 2011, password manager app vendor SplashData has released a list of the 25 most common passwords that it assembles from various sources. Here is the list from 2018:

123456	password	123456789	12345678	12345
111111	1234567	sunshine	qwerty	iloveyou
princess	admin	welcome	666666	abc123
football	123123	monkey	654321	!@#\$%^&*
Charlie	aa123456	donald	password1	qwerty123

As you can see, criminals benefit from the fact that many people use weak, easily guessable passwords.

Password Considerations

When you create passwords, keep in mind that more complex isn't always better, and that the password strength that you choose should depend on how sensitive the data and system are that the password protects. The following sections discuss easily guessable passwords, complicated passwords, sensitive passwords, and password managers.

Easily guessable personal passwords

Criminals know that many people use the name or birth date of their significant other or pet as a password, so crooks often look at social media profiles and do Google searches in order to find likely passwords. They also use automated tools to feed lists of common names to targeted systems one by one, while watching to see whether the system being attacked accepts any of the names as a correct password.

Criminals who launch targeted attacks can exploit the vulnerability created by such personalized, yet easily guessable, passwords. However, the problem is much larger: Sometimes, reconnaissance is done through automated means — so, even opportunistic attackers can leverage such an approach.

Furthermore, because, by definition, a significant percentage of people have common names, the automated feeders of common names often achieve a significant number of hits.

Complicated passwords aren't always better

To address the problems inherent in weak passwords, many experts recommend using long, complex passwords — for example, containing both uppercase and lowercase letters, as well as numbers and special characters.

Using such passwords makes sense in theory, and if such a scheme is utilized to secure access to a small number of sensitive systems, it can work quite well. However, employing such a model for a larger number of passwords is likely to lead to problems that can undermine security:

- » Inappropriately reusing passwords
- » Writing down passwords in insecure locations
- » Selecting passwords with poor randomization and formatted using predictable patterns, such as using a capital for the first letter of a complicated password, followed by all lowercase characters, and then a number

Hence, in the real world, from a practical perspective, because the human mind can't remember many complex passwords, using significant

numbers of complex passwords can create serious security risks.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Bill Burr, the author of NIST Special Publication 800-63 Appendix A (which discusses password complexity requirements), recently admitted that password complexity has failed in practice. He now recommends using passphrases, and not complex passwords, for authentication.

Passphrases are passwords consisting of entire phrases or phrase-length strings of characters, rather than of simply a word or a word-length group of characters. Sometimes passphrases even consist of complete sentences. Think of passphrases as long (usually at least 25 characters) but relatively easy to remember passwords.

Different levels of sensitivity

Not all types of data require the same level of password protection. For example, the government doesn't protect its unclassified systems the same way that it secures its top-secret information and infrastructure.

In your mind or on paper, classify the systems for which you need secure access.

Then informally classify the systems that you access and establish your own informal password policies accordingly.

On the basis of risk levels, feel free to employ different password strategies. Random passwords, passwords composed of multiple words possibly separated with numbers, passphrases, and even simple passwords each have their appropriate uses. Of course, multifactor authentication can, and should, help augment security when it's both appropriate and available.



TIP Establishing a stronger password for online banking than for commenting on a blog on which you plan to comment only once in a blue moon makes sense. Likewise, your password to the blog should probably be stronger than the one used to access a free news site that requires you to log in but on which you never post anything and at which, if your account were compromised, the breach would have zero impact upon you.

Your most sensitive passwords may not be the ones that you think

When classifying your passwords, keep in mind that while people often believe that their online banking and other financial system passwords are their most sensitive passwords, that is not always the case. Because many modern online systems allow people to reset their passwords after validating their identities through email messages sent to their previously known email addresses, a criminal who gains access to someone's email account may be able to do a lot more than just read email without authorization: He or she may be able to reset that user's passwords to many systems, including to some financial institutions.

Likewise, many sites leverage social-media-based authentication capabilities — especially those provided by Facebook and Twitter — so a compromised password on a social media platform can lead to unauthorized parties gaining access to other systems as well, some of which may be quite a bit more sensitive in nature than a site on which you just share pictures.

You can reuse passwords — sometimes

You may be surprised to read this statement in an information security book: You don't need to use strong passwords for accounts that you create solely because a website requires a login, but that does not, from your perspective, protect anything of value. If you create an account in order to access free resources, for example, and you have nothing whatsoever of value stored within the account, and you don't mind

getting a new account the next time you log in, you can even use a weak password — and use it again for other similar sites.



TIP Essentially, think about it like this: If the requirement to register and log in is solely for the benefit of the site owner — to track users, market to them, and so on — and it doesn't matter one iota to you whether a criminal obtained the access credentials to your account and changed them, use a simple password. Doing so will preserve your memory for sites where password strength matters. Of course, if you use a password manager, you can use a stronger password for such sites.

Consider using a password manager

Alternatively, you can use a password manager tool, shown in [Figure 7-1](#), to securely store your passwords. Password managers are software that help people manage passwords by generating, storing, and retrieving complex passwords. Password managers typically store all their data in encrypted formats and provide access to users only after authenticating them with either a strong password or multifactor authentication.

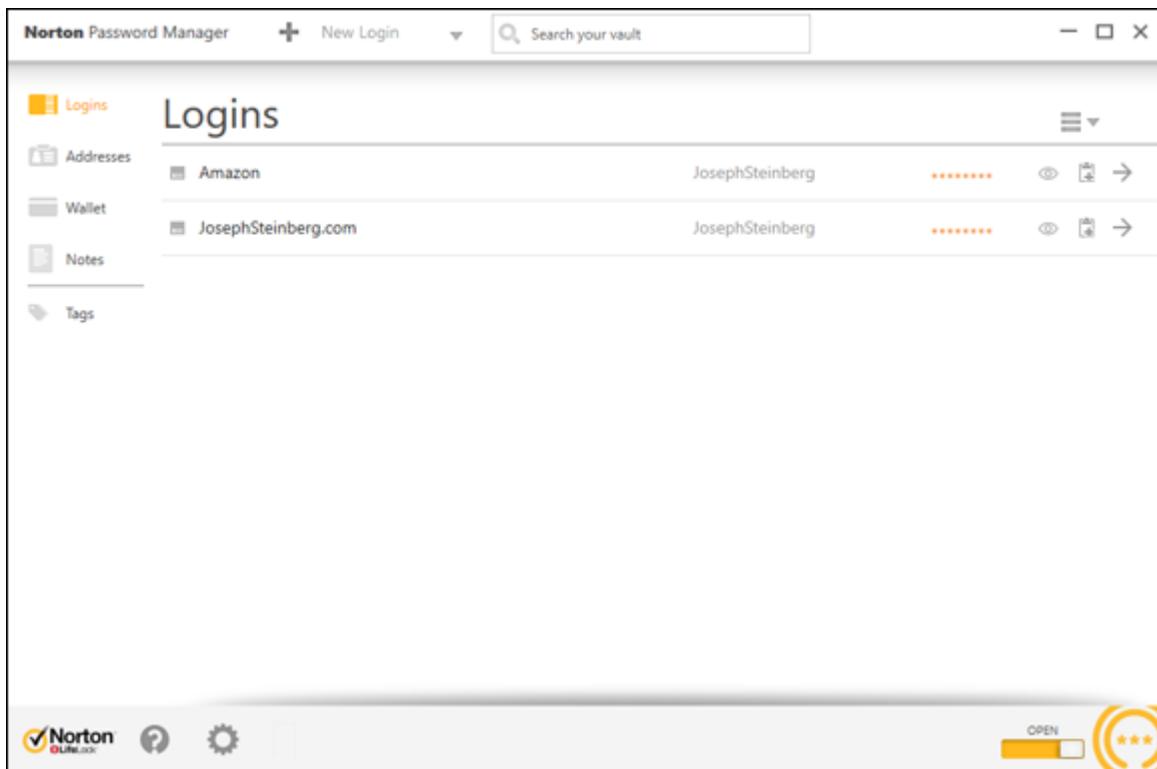


FIGURE 7-1: A password manager.



WARNING Such technology is appropriate for general passwords, but not for the most sensitive ones. Various password managers have been hacked, and if something does go wrong when all your eggs are in one basket, you may have a nightmare on your hands.

Of course, be sure to properly secure any device that you use to access your password manager.

Many password managers are on the market. While all utilize encryption to protect the sensitive data that they store, some store passwords locally (for example, in a database on your phone), while others store them in the cloud.

Many modern smartphones come equipped with a so-called *secure area* — a private, encrypted space that is *sandboxed*, or separated, into its own running environment. Ideally, any password information stored on a mobile device is stored protected in the secure area (see [Figure 7-2](#)).

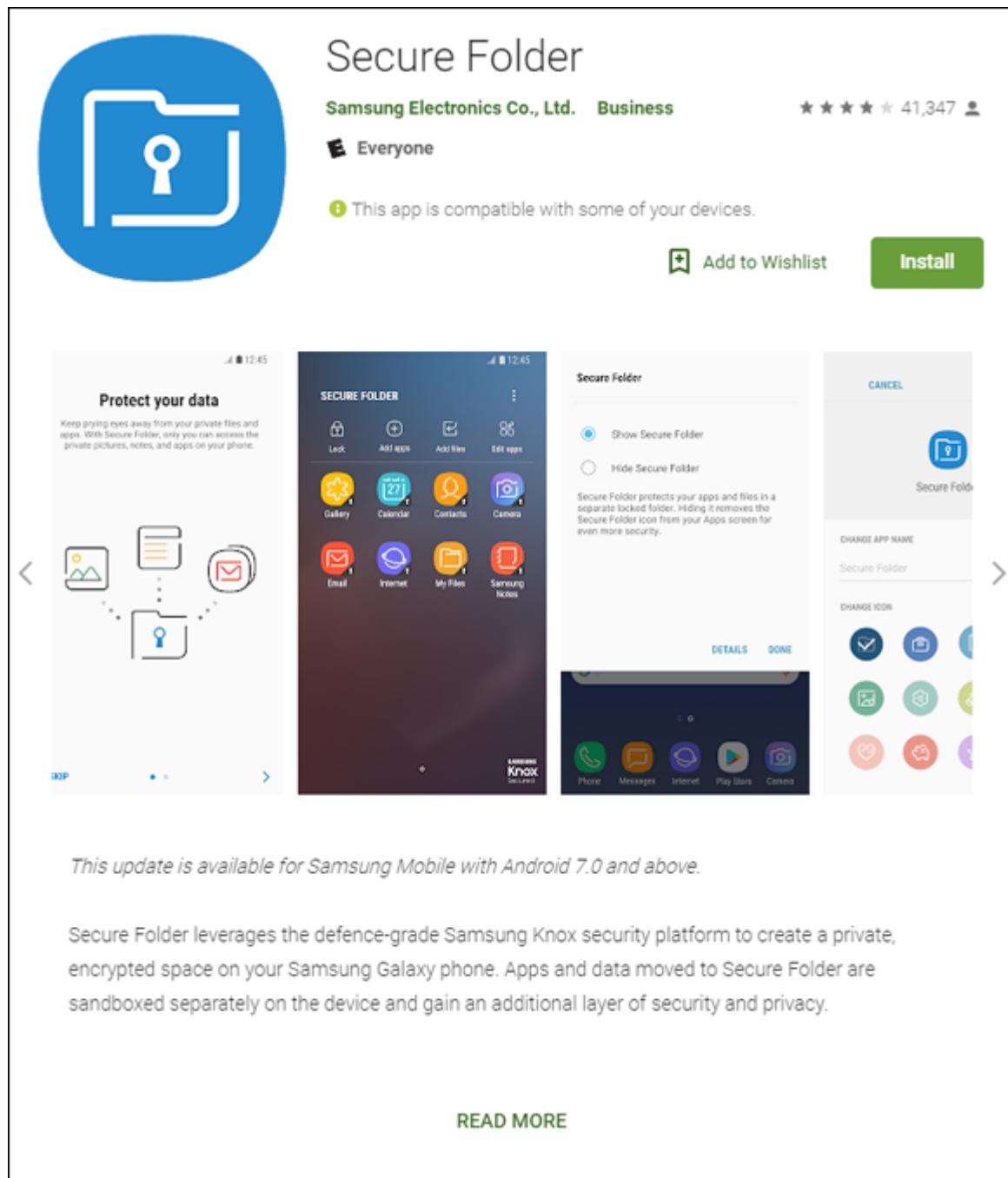


FIGURE 7-2: Secure Folder, the secure area app provided by Samsung for its Android series of phones, as seen in the Google Play Store.

Data that is stored in the secure area can't be accessed unless a user enters the secure area, usually by running a secure area app and entering a special password. Devices also typically display some special symbol somewhere on the screen when a user is working with data or an app located in the secure area.

Creating Memorable, Strong Passwords

The following list offers suggestions that may help you create strong passwords that are, for most people, far easier to remember than a seemingly random, unintelligible mix of letters, numbers, and symbols:

- » **Combine three or more unrelated words and proper nouns, with numbers separating them.** For example, laptop2william7cows is far easier to remember than 6ytBgv%j8P. In general, the longer the words you use within the password, the stronger the resulting password will be.
- » **If you must use a special character, add a special character before each number; you can even use the same character for all your passwords.** (If you use the same passwords as in the previous example and follow this advice, the password is laptop%2william%7cows.) In theory, reusing the same character may not be the best way to do things from a security standpoint, but, doing so makes memorization much easier, and the security should still be good enough for purposes for which a password is suitable on its own anyway.
- » **Ideally, use at least one non-English word or proper name.** Choose a word or name that is familiar to you but that others are unlikely to guess. Don't use the name of your significant other, best friend, or pet.
- » **If you must use both capital and lowercase letters (or want to make your password even stronger), use capitals that always appear in a particular location throughout all your strong passwords.** Make sure, though, that you don't put them at the start of words because that location is where most people put them. For example, if you know that you always capitalize the second and third letter of the last word, then laptop2william7kALb isn't harder to remember than laptop2william7kalb.

Knowing When to Change Your Password

Conventional wisdom — as you have likely heard many times — is that it is ideal to change your password quite frequently. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), for example, recommends on its website that people (including the disproportionately older folks who comprise its membership) “change critical passwords frequently, possibly every other week.”

Theoretically, such an approach is correct — frequent changes reduce risks in several ways — but, in reality, it’s bad advice that you shouldn’t follow.

If you have a bank account, mortgage, a couple credit cards, a phone bill, high speed Internet bill, utility bills, social media accounts, email accounts, and so on, you may easily be talking about a dozen or so critical passwords. Changing them every two weeks would mean 312 new critical passwords to remember within the span of every year — and you likely have many more passwords on top of that figure. For many people, changing important passwords every two weeks may mean learning a hundred new passwords every month.

Unless you have a phenomenal, photographic memory, how likely is it that you’ll remember all such passwords? Or will you simply make your passwords weaker in order to facilitate remembering them after frequent changes?

The bottom line is that changing passwords often makes remembering them far more difficult, increasing the odds that you’ll write them down and store them insecurely, select weaker passwords, and/or set your new passwords to be the same as old passwords with minute changes (for example, password2 to replace password1).



REMEMBER So, here is the reality: If you select strong, unique passwords to begin with and the sites where you've used them aren't believed to have been compromised, the cons of frequently changing the passwords outweigh the pros. Changing such passwords every few years may be a good idea. In reality, if a system alerts you of multiple failed attempts to log in to your account and you're not alerted of such activity, you can likely go for many years with no changes without exposing yourself to significant risk.

Of course, if you use a password manager that can reset passwords, you can configure it to reset them often. In fact, I've worked with a commercial password-management system used for protecting system administration access to sensitive financial systems that automatically reset administrators' passwords every time they logged on.

Changing Passwords after a Breach

If you receive notification from a business, organization, or government entity that it has suffered a security breach and that you should change your password, follow these tips:

- » Don't click any links in the message because most such messages are scams.
- » Visit the organization's website and official social media accounts to verify that such an announcement was actually made.
- » Pay attention to news stories to see whether reliable, mainstream media is reporting such a breach.
- » If the story checks out, go to the organization's website and make the change.



TIP Do not change all your passwords after every breach. Ignore experts who cry wolf and tell you to do so after every single breach as a matter of extra caution. Doing so isn't necessary, uses up your brainpower, time, and energy, and dissuades you from changing passwords when you actually need to do so. After all, if you do make such password changes and then find out that your friends who fared no worse than you after a breach, you may grow weary and ignore future warnings to change your password when doing so is actually necessary.

If you reuse passwords on sites where the passwords matter — which you should not be doing — and a password that is compromised somewhere is also used on other sites, be sure to change it at the other sites as well. In such a case, also take the opportunity when resetting passwords to switch to unique passwords for each of the sites.

Providing Passwords to Humans

On its website, the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recommends the following:

*Don't share passwords on the phone, in texts, or by email.
Legitimate companies will not send you messages asking for your password.*

That sounds like good advice, and it would be, if it were not for one important fact: Legitimate businesses do ask you for passwords over the phone!

So, how do you know when it is safe to provide your password and when it is not?

Should you just check your caller ID?

No. The sad reality is that crooks spoof caller IDs on a regular basis.

What you should do is never provide any sensitive information — including passwords, of course — over the phone unless you initiated the call with the party requesting the password and are sure that you called the legitimate party. It is far less risky, for example, to provide an account's phone-access password to a customer service representative who asks for it during a conversation initiated by you calling to the bank using the number printed on your ATM card than if someone calls you claiming to be from your bank and requests the same private information in order to "verify your identity."

Storing Passwords

Ideally, don't write down your passwords to sensitive systems or store them anywhere other than in your brain.

For less sensitive passwords, use a password manager or store them in an encrypted form on a strongly-secured computer or device. If you store your passwords on a phone, use the secure area. (For more on password managers and your phone's secure area, see the section "[Consider using a password manager](#)," earlier in this chapter.)

Transmitting Passwords

Theoretically, you should never email or text someone a password. So, what should you do if your child texts you from school saying that he or she forgot the password to his or her email, or the like?



TIP Ideally, if you need to give someone a password, call him or her and don't provide the password until you identify the other party by voice. If, for some reason, you must send a password in writing, choose to use an encrypted connection, which is offered by various chat tools. If no such tool is available, consider splitting the password and sending some via email and some via text.

Obviously, none of these methods are ideal ways to transmit passwords, but they certainly are better options than what so many people do, which is to simply text or email people passwords in clear text.

Discovering Alternatives to Passwords

On some occasions, you should take advantage of alternatives to password authentication. While there are many ways to authenticate people, a modern user is likely to encounter certain types:

- » Biometric authentication
- » SMS-based authentication
- » App-based one-time passwords
- » Hardware token authentication
- » USB-based authentication

Biometric authentication

Biometric authentication refers to authenticating using some unique identifier of your physical person — for example, your fingerprint.

Using biometrics — especially in combination with a password — can be a strong method of authentication, and it certainly has its place. Two popular forms used in the consumer market are fingerprints and iris-based authentication.

In many cases, though, you may be better off using a strong password. Before using biometric authentication, consider the following points:

- » **Your fingerprints are likely all over your phone.** You hold your phone with your fingers. How hard would it be for criminals who steal the phone to lift your prints and unlock the phone if you enable fingerprint based authentication using a phone's built-in fingerprint reader (see [Figure 7-3](#))? If anything sensitive is on the device, it may

be at risk. No, the average crook looking to make a quick buck selling your phone is unlikely to spend the time to unlock it — he or she will more than likely just wipe it — but if someone wants the data on your phone for whatever reason, and you used fingerprints to secure your device, you may have a serious problem on your hands (pun intended).

- » **If your biometric information is captured, you can't reset it as you can a password.** Do you fully trust the parties to whom you're giving this information to properly protect it?
- » **If your biometric information is on your phone or computer, what happens if malware somehow infects your device?** What happens if a server where you stored the same information is breached? Are you positive that all the data is properly encrypted and that the software on your device fully defended your biometric data from capture?
- » **Cold weather creates problems.** Fingerprints can't be read even through smartphone-compatible gloves.
- » **Glasses, as worn by millions of people, pose challenges to iris scanners.** Some iris readers require a user to take off his or her glasses in order to authenticate. If you use such authentication to secure a phone, you may have difficulty unlocking your phone when you're outdoors on a sunny day.
- » **Biometrics can undermine your rights.** If, for some reason, law enforcement wants to access the data on your biometric-protected phone or other computer system, it may be able to force you to provide your biometric authentication, even in countries like the United States where you have the right to remain silent and not provide a password. Likewise, the government may be able to obtain a warrant to collect your biometric data, which, unlike a password, you can't reset. Even if the data proves you innocent of whatever the government suspects you have done wrong, do you trust the government to properly secure the data over the long term?
- » **Impersonation is possible.** Some quasi-biometric authentication, such as the face recognition on some devices, can be tricked into

believing that a person is present by playing to them a high-definition video of that person.

- » **Voice-based authentication is useful for voice phone calls.** This type of authentication is especially useful when used in combination with other forms of authentication, such as a password. Many organizations use it to authenticate customers who call in — sometimes without even telling customers. That said, voice authentication can't be used for online sessions without inconveniencing users.

As such, biometrics have their place. Using a fingerprint to unlock features on your phone is certainly convenient but think before you proceed. Be certain that in your case the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.



FIGURE 7-3: A phone fingerprint sensor on a Samsung Galaxy S9 in an Otterbox case. Some phones have the reader on the front, while others, like the S9, have it on the back.

HACKERS VERSUS SENSOR

How long did it take hackers to defeat a new fingerprint sensor? Less than 24 hours.

Within 24 hours of the release of the first iPhone with a fingerprint reader, hackers claimed to have defeated it. Furthermore, several years ago, the Discovery Channel television show *Myth Busters* demonstrated how simple it can be for someone to defeat a fingerprint authentication system. Technology has improved since then — but so have criminals' capabilities.

SMS-based authentication

In *SMS (text message)-based authentication*, a code is sent to your cellphone. You then enter that code into a web or app to prove your identity. This type of authentication is, in itself, not considered secure enough for authentication when true multifactor authentication is required. Sophisticated criminals have ways of intercepting such passwords, and social engineering of phone companies in order to take over people's phone numbers remains a problem.

That said, SMS one-time passwords used in combination with a strong password are a step above just using the password.



WARNING Keep in mind, however, that, in most cases, one-time passwords are worthless as a security measure if you send them to a criminal's phishing website instead of a legitimate site. The criminal can replay them to the real site in real time.

App-based one-time passwords

One-time passwords generated with an app running on a phone or computer are a good addition to strong passwords, but they should not be used on their own. App-based one-time passwords are likely a more secure way to authenticate than SMS-based one-time passwords (see preceding section), but they can be inconvenient; if you get a new phone, for example, you may need to reconfigure information at every one of the sites where you're using one-time passwords created by the generator app running on your smartphone.

As with SMS-based one-time passwords, if you send an app-generated one-time password to a criminal's phishing website instead of a legitimate site, the criminal can replay it to the corresponding real site in real time, undermining the security benefits of the one-time password in their entirety.

Hardware token authentication

Hardware tokens (see [Figure 7-4](#)) that generate new one-time passwords every x seconds are similar to the apps described in the preceding section with the major difference being that you need to carry a specialized device that generates the one-time codes. Some tokens can also function in other modes — for example, allowing for challenge-response types of authentication in which the site being logged into displays a challenge number that the user enters into the token in order to retrieve a corresponding response number that the user enters into the site in order to authenticate.



FIGURE 7-4: An RSA SecurID brand one-time password generator hardware token.

Although hardware token devices normally are more secure than one-time generator apps in that the former don't run on devices that can be infected by malware or taken over by criminals remotely, they can be inconvenient. They are also prone to getting lost and are not always waterproof — and sometimes get destroyed when people do their laundry after leaving the devices in their pants pockets.

USB-based authentication

USB devices that contain authentication information — for example, digital certificates — can strengthen authentication. Care must be exercised, however, to use such devices only in combination with trusted machines — you don't want the device infected or destroyed by some device, and you want to be sure that the machine obtaining the certificate, for example, doesn't transmit it to an unauthorized party.

Many modern USB-based devices offer all sorts of defenses against such attacks. Of course, you can connect USB devices only to devices and apps that support USB-based authentication. You also must carry the device with you and ensure that it doesn't get lost or damaged.

Chapter 8

Preventing Social Engineering

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Being aware of the various forms of social engineering attacks
 - » Discovering the strategies that criminals use to craft effective attacks
 - » Realizing how overshared information can help criminals
 - » Recognizing phony social media accounts
 - » Protecting yourself and your loved ones from social engineering attacks
-

Most, if not all, major breaches that have occurred in recent years have involved some element of social engineering. Do not let devious criminals trick you or your loved ones. In this chapter, you find out how to protect yourself

Don't Trust Technology More than You Would People

Would you give your online banking password to a random stranger who asked for it after walking up to you in the street and telling you that he worked for your bank?

If the answer is no — which it certainly should be — you need to exercise the same lack of trust when it comes to technology. The fact that your computer shows you an email sent by some party that claims to be your bank instead of a random person approaching you on the street and making a similar claim is no reason to give that email your trust any more than you would give the stranger.

In short, you don't give offers from strangers approaching you on the street the benefit of the doubt, so don't do so for offers communicated electronically — they may be even more risky.

Types of Social Engineering Attacks

Phishing attacks are one of the most common forms of social engineering attacks. (For more on phishing and social engineering, see [Chapter 2](#).) [Figure 8-1](#) shows you an example of a phishing email.

If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.

From: Wells Fargo Online <atmarin@calpoly.edu>
To: Recipients
Cc:
Subject: Your Account Has Been Compromised.



wellsfargo.com

Your Account has been restricted, unlock

Your account has been limited for security reason to keep your account safe note all your transaction will be monitored to enhance your security.

To Unlock click on the below link and follow the security check Questions:

Go to <http://www.welsfargo.com/secure>

Answer the security questions carefully and correctly.

After you answer all the security question has been answer you dont have to do anything.

If you have questions about your account, please refer to the contact information on your statement. For questions about viewing your statements online, Wells Fargo C https://www.wellsfargo.com/privacy_security/fraud available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call [Click to follow link](#) or sign on to send a [secure email](#).

wellsfargo.com | Fraud Information Center

Please do not reply to this email directly. To ensure a prompt and secure response, sign on to email us.

213405-168-a5ed-117d3a1aa2-b28b65a2_5716fc7a_131b0-721

FIGURE 8-1: A phishing email.

Phishing attacks sometimes utilize a technique called *pretexting* in which the criminal sending the phishing email fabricates a situation that both gains trust from targets as well as underscores the supposed need for the intended victims to act quickly. In the phishing email shown in [Figure 8-1](#), note that the sender, impersonating Wells Fargo bank, included a link

to the real Wells Fargo within the email, but failed to properly disguise the sending address.

[Chapter 2](#) discusses common forms of social engineering attacks, including spear phishing emails, smishing, spear smishing, vishing, spear vishing, and CEO fraud. Additional types of social engineering attacks are popular as well:

- » **Baiting:** An attacker sends an email or chat message — or even makes a social media post that promises someone a reward in exchange for taking some action — for example, telling a target that if she completes a survey, she will receive a free item (see [Figure 8-2](#)). Sometimes such promises are real, but often they're not and are simply ways of incentivizing someone to take a specific action that she would not take otherwise. Sometimes such scammers seek payment of a small shipping fee for the prize, sometimes they distribute malware, and sometimes they collect sensitive information. There is even malware that baits.



WARNING Don't confuse baiting with *scambaiting*. The latter refers to a form of vigilantism in which people pretend to be gullible, would-be victims, and waste scammers' time and resources through repeated interactions, as well as (sometimes) collect intelligence about the scammer that can be turned over to law enforcement or published on the Internet to warn others of the scammer.

- » **Quid pro quo:** The attacker states that he needs the person to take an action in order to render a service for the intended victim. For example, an attacker may pretend to be an IT support manager offering assistance to an employee in installing a new security software update. If the employee cooperates, the criminal walks him through the process of installing malware.
- » **Social media impersonation:** Some attackers impersonate people on social media in order to establish social media connections with their victims. The parties being impersonated may be real people or

nonexistent entities. The scammers behind the impersonation shown in [Figure 8-3](#) and many other such accounts frequently contact the people who follow the accounts, pretending to be the author, and request that the followers make various “investments.” (To find out how you can protect yourself from social media impersonation, see the section “[General Cyberhygiene Can Help Prevent Social Engineering](#),” later in this chapter.)

- » **Tantalizing emails:** These emails attempt to trick people into running malware or clicking on poisoned links by exploiting their curiosity, sexual desires, and other characteristics.
- » **Tailgating:** *Tailgating* is a physical form of social engineering attack in which the attacker accompanies authorized personnel as they approach a doorway that they, but not the attacker, are authorized to pass and tricks them into letting him pass with the authorized personnel. The attacker may pretend to be searching through a purse for an access card, claim to have forgotten his card, or may simply act social and follow the authorized party in.
- » **False alarms:** Raising false alarms can also social engineer people into allowing unauthorized people to do things that they should not be allowed to. Consider the case in which an attacker pulls the fire alarm inside a building and manages to enter normally secured areas through an emergency door that someone else used to quickly exit due to the so-called emergency.
- » **Water holing:** Water holing combines hacking and social engineering by exploiting the fact that people trust certain parties, so, for example, they may click on links when viewing that party’s website even if they’d never click on links in an email or text message. Criminals may launch a watering hole attack by breaching the relevant site and inserting the poisoned links on it (or even depositing malware directly onto it).
- » **Virus hoaxes:** Criminals exploit the fact that people are concerned about cybersecurity, and likely pay undeserved attention to messages that they receive warning about a cybergangster. Virus hoax emails may contain poisoned links, direct a user to download software, or

instruct a user to contact IT support via some email address or web page. These attacks come in many flavors — some attacks distribute them as mass emails, while others send them in a highly targeted fashion.

Some people consider scareware that scares users into believing that they need to purchase some particular security software (as described in [Chapter 2](#)) to be a form of virus hoax. Others do not because scareware’s “scaring” is done by malware that is already installed, not by a hoax message that pretends that malware is already installed.

- » **Technical failures:** Criminals can easily exploit humans’ annoyance with technology problems to undermine various security technologies.

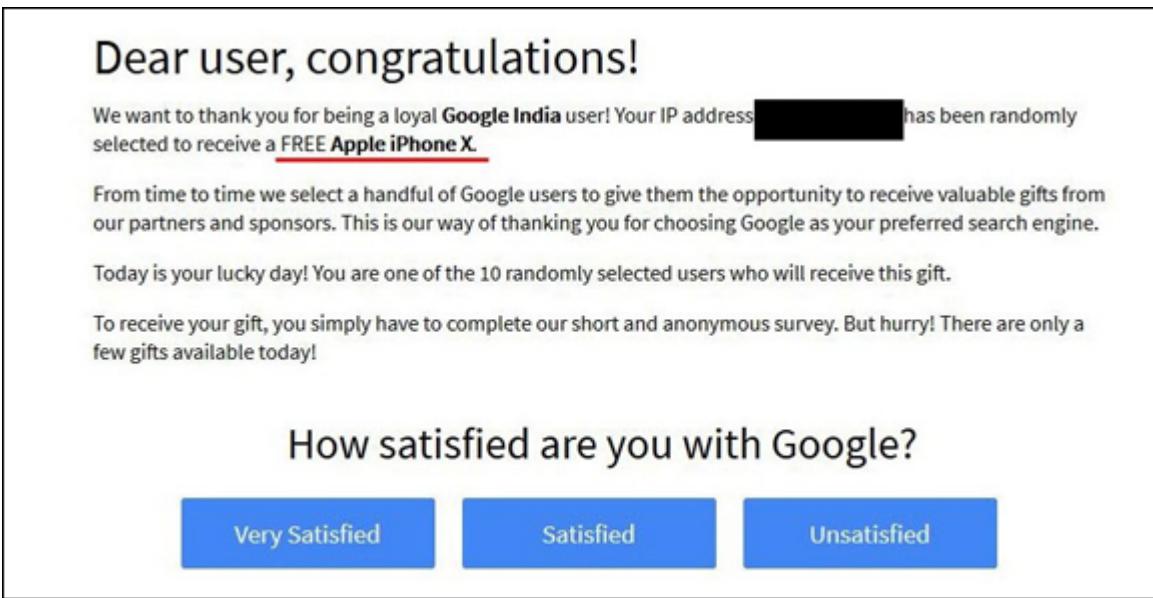


FIGURE 8-2: Example of a baiting message.

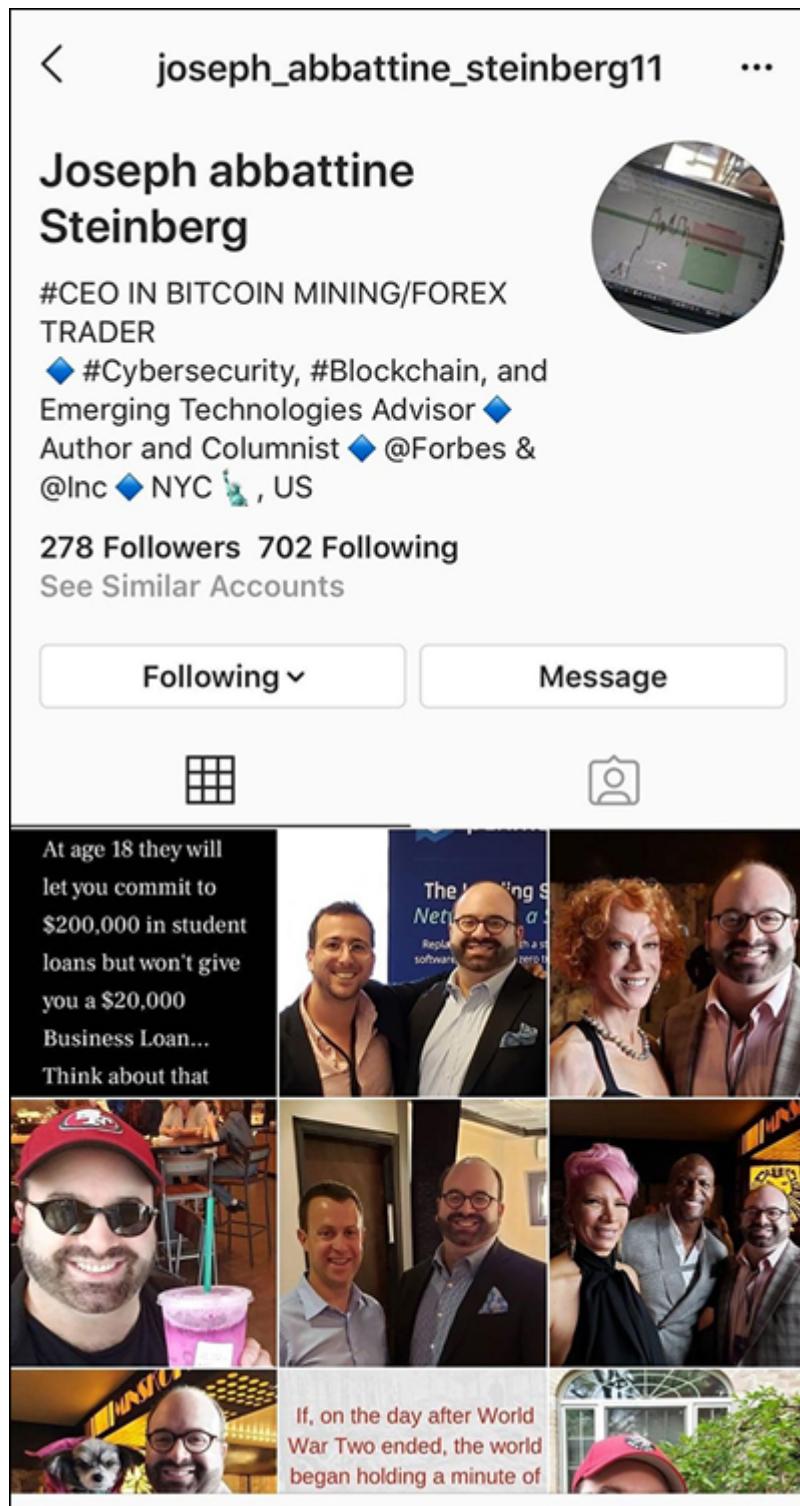


FIGURE 8-3: An example of an Instagram account impersonating the author, using his name, bio, and primarily photos lifted from his real Instagram account.

For example, if a criminal impersonating a website that normally displays a security image in a particular area places a “broken image

symbol” in the same area of the clone website, many users will not perceive danger, as they are accustomed to seeing broken-image symbols and associate them with technical failures rather than security risks.

Six Principles Social Engineers Exploit

Social psychologist Robert Beno Cialdini, in his 1984 work published by HarperCollins, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, explains six important, basic concepts that people seeking to influence others often leverage. Social engineers seeking to trick people often exploit these same six principles, so I provide a quick overview of them in the context of information security.



TIP The following list helps you understand and internalize the methods crooks are likely to use to try to gain your trust:

- » **Social proof:** People tend to do things that they see other people doing.
- » **Reciprocity:** People, in general, often believe that if someone did something nice for them, they owe it to that person to do something nice back.
- » **Authority:** People tend to obey authority figures, even when they disagree with the authority figures and even when they think what they’re being asked to do is objectionable.
- » **Likeability:** People are, generally speaking, more easily persuaded by people who they like than by others.
- » **Consistency and commitment:** If people make a commitment to accomplish some goal and internalize that commitment, it becomes part of their self-image, and they’re likely to attempt to pursue the

goal even if the original reason for pursuing the goal is no longer at all relevant.

- » **Scarcity:** If people think that a particular resource is scarce, regardless of whether it actually is scarce, they will want it, even if they don't need it.

Don't Overshare on Social Media

Oversharing information on social media arms criminals with material that they can use to social engineer you, your family members, your colleagues at work, and your friends.

If, for example your privacy settings allow anyone with access to the social media platform to see your posted media, your risk increases. Many times, people accidentally share posts with the whole world that they intended for only a small group of people.

Furthermore, in multiple situations, bugs in social media platform software have created vulnerabilities that allowed unauthorized parties to view media and posts that had privacy settings set to disallow such access.

Also, consider your privacy settings. Family-related material with privacy settings set to allow nonfamily members to view it may result in all sorts of privacy-related issues and leak the answers to various popular challenge questions used for authenticating users, such as “Where does your oldest sibling live?” or “What is your mother’s maiden name?”



WARNING Don't rely on social media privacy settings to protect truly confidential data. Some social media platforms allow for granular protection of posted items, while others do not.

Certain items, if shared, may help criminals social engineer you or someone you know. This list isn't meant to be comprehensive. Rather, it's meant to illustrate examples to stimulate your thinking about the

potential risks of what you intend to post on social media before you go ahead and post it.

The following sections describes information you should be cautious of sharing on social media.



REMEMBER Numerous other types of social media posts than the ones I list in the following sections can help criminals orchestrate social engineering attacks. Think about potential consequences before you post and set your posts' privacy settings accordingly.

SOCIAL MEDIA WARNING SYSTEMS

Tools are available to warn people if they are oversharing on social media, including one which the author helped design. A snippet of a configuration screen appears in the figure

System Rules Business Rules Custom Rules Ignore Rules

Financial institutions
Warn if the names of financial institutions are mentioned in your social media. Notifying people of where a person has accounts can help criminals commit fraud.

Sins
Flag mentions of sex, alcohol, and drugs - public discussion of which is viewed in a negative light.

Vulgarities
Warn if vulgarities are used.

Doctors
Warn if the various types of doctors are mentioned. Often, it is possible for people to discern that a person has a specific medical condition from the type of doctor that they see; hence, this typ...

Medical terminology
Warn if the various medical terms are mentioned. Often, it is possible for people to discern that a person has a specific medical

Your schedule and travel plans

Details of your schedule or someone else's schedule may provide criminals with information that may help them set up an attack. For example, if you post that you'll be attending an upcoming event, such as a wedding, you may provide criminals with the ability to *virtually kidnap* you or other attendees — never mind incentivizing others to target your home with a break-in attempt when the home is likely to be empty. (*Virtual kidnapping* refers to a criminal making a ransom demand in exchange for the same return of someone who the criminal claims to have kidnapped, but who in fact, the criminal has not kidnapped.)

Likewise, revealing that you'll be flying on a particular flight may provide criminals with the ability to virtually kidnap you or attempt CEO-type fraud against your colleagues. They may impersonate you and send an email saying that you're flying and may not be reachable by phone for confirmation of the instructions so just go ahead and follow them anyway.

Also, avoid posting about a family member's vacation or trip, which may increase risks of virtual kidnapping (and of real physical dangers to that person or his belongings).

Financial information

Sharing a credit card number may lead to fraudulent charges, while posting a bank account number can lead to fraudulent bank activity.

In addition, don't reveal that you visited or interacted with a particular financial institution or the locations where you store your money — banks, crypto-exchange accounts, brokerages, and so forth. Doing so can increase the odds that criminals will attempt to social engineer their way into your accounts at the relevant financial institution(s). As such, such sharing may expose you to attempts to breach your accounts, as well as targeted phishing, vishing, and smishing attacks and all sorts of other social engineering scams.

Posting about potential investments, such as stocks, bonds, precious metals, or cryptocurrencies, can expose you to cyberattacks because criminals may assume that you have significant money to steal. (If you

encourage people to invest or make various other forms of posts, you may also run afoul of SEC, CFTC, or other regulations.) You may also open the door to criminals who impersonate regulators and contact you to pay a fine for posting information inappropriately.

Personal information

For starters, avoid listing your family members in your Facebook profile's About section. That About section links to their Facebook profiles and explains to viewers the nature of the relevant family relationship with each party listed. By listing these relationships, you may leak all sorts of information that may be valuable for criminals. Not only will you possibly reveal your mother's maiden name (challenge question answer!), you may also provide clues about where you grew up. The information found in your profile also provides criminals with a list of people to social engineer or contact as part of a virtual kidnapping scam.

Also you should avoid sharing the following information on social media, as doing so can undermine your authentication questions and help criminals social engineer you or your family:

- » Your father's middle name
- » Your mother's birthday
- » Where you met your significant other
- » Your favorite vacation spot
- » The name of the first school that you attended
- » The street on which you grew up
- » The type, make, model, and/or color of your first car or someone else's
- » Your or others' favorite food or drink

Likewise, never share your Social Security number as doing so may lead to identity theft.

Information about your children



WARNING Sharing information about your children can not only set you up for attacks, but put your children at great risk of physical danger. For example, photos of your children may assist a kidnapper. The problem may be exacerbated if the images contain a timestamp and/or *geotagging* — that is, information about the location at which a photograph was taken.

Timestamps and geotagging do not need to be done per some technical specification to create risks. If it is clear from the images where your kids go to school, attend after-school activities, and so on, you may expose them to danger.

In addition, referring to the names of schools, camps, day care facilities, or other youth programs that your children or their friends attend may increase the risk of a pedophile, kidnapper, or other malevolent party targeting them. Such a post may also expose you to potential burglars because they'll know when you're likely not to be home. The risk can be made much worse if a clear pattern regarding your schedule and/or your children's schedule can be extrapolated from such posts.

Also avoid posting about a child's school or camp trip.

Information about your pets

As with your mother's maiden name, sharing your current pet's name or your first pet's name can set you or others who you know up for social engineering attacks because such information is often used as an answer to authentication questions.

Work information

Details about with which technologies you work with at your present job (or a previous job) may help criminals both scan for vulnerabilities in your employers' systems and social engineer your colleagues.

Many virus hoaxes and scams have gone viral — and inflicted far more damage than they should have — because criminals exploit people's fear of cyberattacks and leverage the likelihood that many people will share

posts about cyber-risks, often without verifying the authenticity of such posts.

Information about a moving violation or parking ticket that you received not only presents yourself in a less-than-the-best light, but can inadvertently provide prosecutors with the material that they need to convict you of the relevant offense. You may also give crooks the ability to social engineer you or others — they may pretend to be law enforcement, a court, or an attorney contacting you about the matter — perhaps even demanding that a fine be paid immediately in order to avoid an arrest.

In addition to helping criminals social engineer you in a fashion similar to the moving violation case, information about a crime that you or a loved one committed may harm you professionally and personally.

Medical or legal advice

If you offer medical or legal advice, people may be able to extrapolate that you or a loved one has a particular medical condition, or involved in a particular legal situation.

Your location

Your location or *check-in* on social media may not only increase the risk to yourself and your loved ones of physical danger, but may help criminals launch virtual kidnapping attacks and other social engineering scams.

A happy birthday message to anyone may reveal the person's birthday. Folks who use fake birthdays on social media for security reasons have seen their precautions undermined in such a fashion by would-be well-wishers. Anything that is "sin-like" may lead not only to professional or personal harm, but to blackmail-like attempts as well as social engineering of yourself or others depicted in such posts or media.

In addition, an image of you in a place frequented by people of certain religious, sexual, political, cultural, or other affiliations can lead to criminals extrapolating information about you that may lead to all sorts of social engineering. Criminals are known, for example, to have

virtually kidnapped a person who was in synagogue and unreachable on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. They knew when and where he would be walking on his way to the temple, and called family members (at a time that they knew he would be impossible to reach) claiming to have kidnapped the person. The family members fell for the virtual kidnapping scam because the details were right and they were unable to reach the “victim” by telephone in the middle of a synagogue service.

Leaking Data by Sharing Information as Part of Viral Trends

From time to time, a *viral trend* occurs, in which many people share similar content. Posts about the ice bucket challenge, your favorite concerts, and something about you today and ten years ago are all examples of viral trends. Of course, future viral trends may have nothing to do with prior ones. Any type of post that spreads quickly to large numbers of people is said to have “gone viral.”



WARNING While participating may seem fun — and “what everyone else is doing” — be sure that you understand the potential consequences of doing so. For example, sharing information about the concerts that you attended and that you consider to be your favorites can reveal a lot about you — especially in combination with other profile data — and can expose you to all sorts of social engineering risks.

Identifying Fake Social Media Connections

Social media delivers many professional and personal benefits to its users, but it also creates amazing opportunities for criminals — many people have an innate desire to connect with others and are overly trusting of social media platforms. They assume that if, for example, Facebook sends a message that Joseph Steinberg has requested to become a friend, that the real “Joseph Steinberg” has requested as such — when, often, that is not the case.

Criminals know, for example, that by connecting with you on social media, they can gain access to all sorts of information about you, your family members, and your work colleagues — information that they can often exploit in order to impersonate you, a relative, or a colleague as

part of criminal efforts to social engineer a path into business systems, steal money, or commit other crimes.

One technique that criminals often use to gain access to people's "private" Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn information is to create fake profiles — profiles of nonexistent people — and request to connect with real people, many of whom are likely to accept the relevant connection requests. Alternatively, scammers may set up accounts that impersonate real people — and which have profile photos and other materials lifted from the impersonated party's legitimate social media accounts.

How can you protect yourself from such scams? The following sections offer advice on how to quickly spot fake accounts — and how to avoid the possible repercussions of accepting connections from them.



REMEMBER Keep in mind that none of the clues in the following sections operates in a vacuum or is absolute. The fact that a profile fails when tested against a particular rule, for example, doesn't automatically mean that it is bogus. But applying smart concepts such as the ones I list in the following sections should help you identify a significant percentage of fake accounts and save yourself from the problems that can ultimately result from accepting connection requests from them.

Photo

Many fake accounts use photos of attractive models, sometimes targeting men who have accounts that show photos of women and women whose accounts have photos of men. The pictures often appear to be stock photos, but sometimes are stolen from real users.



WARNING If you receive a social media connection request from someone who you don't remember ever meeting and the picture is of this

type, beware. If you're in doubt, you can load the image into Google's reverse image search and see where else it appears.

You can also search on the person's name (and, if appropriate, on LinkedIn) or title to see whether any other similar photos appear online. However, a crafty impersonator may upload images to several sites.

Obviously, any profile without a photo of the account holder should raise red flags. Keep in mind, though, that some people do use emojis, caricatures, and so on as profile photos, especially on nonprofessional-oriented social media networks.

Verification

If an account appears to represent a public figure who you suspect is likely to be verified (meaning it has a blue check mark next to the user's account name to indicate that the account is the legitimate account of a public figure), but it is not verified, that is a likely sign that something is amiss.

Likewise, it is unlikely that a verified account on a major social media platform is fake. However, there have been occasions on which verified accounts of such nature have been taken over temporarily by hackers.

Friends or connections in common

Fake people are unlikely to have many friends or connections in common with you, and fake folks usually will not even have many secondary connections (Friends of Friends, LinkedIn second level connections, and so on) in common with you either.



WARNING Don't assume that an account is legitimate just because it has one or two connections in common with you; some of your connections may have fallen for a scam and connected with a fake person, and your contact's connecting with the fake account may be how the criminal found out about you in the first place. Even in such a scenario, the number of shared connections is likely to be relatively small as compared with a real, mutual connection, and the human relationship between the friends who did connect with the crook's profile may seem difficult to piece together.

You know your connections better than anyone else — exercise caution when someone's connection patterns don't make sense. You may want to think twice, for example, if someone trying to connect with you seems to know nobody in the industry in which she works, but knows three of your most gullible friends who live in three different countries and who do not know one another.

Relevant posts

Another huge red flag is when an account is not sharing material that it should be sharing based on the alleged identity of the account holder. If someone claims to be a columnist who currently writes for *Forbes*, for example, and attempts to but has never shared any posts of any articles that he or she wrote for *Forbes*, something is likely amiss.

Number of connections

A senior-level person, with many years of work experience, is likely to have many professional connections, especially on LinkedIn. The fewer connections that an account ostensibly belonging to a senior level person has on LinkedIn (the further it is from 500 or more), the more suspicious you should be.

Of course, every LinkedIn profile started with zero connections — so legitimate, new LinkedIn accounts may seem suspicious when they truly are not — but practical reality comes into play: How many of the

real, senior-level people who are now contacting you didn't establish their LinkedIn accounts until recently? Of course, a small number of connections and a new LinkedIn account isn't abnormal for a person who just started his first job or for people working in certain industries, in certain roles, and/or at certain companies — CIA secret agents don't post their career progress in their LinkedIn profiles — but if you work in those industries, you're likely aware of this fact already.

Contrast the number of connection with the age of an account and the number of posts it has interacted with or has shared — a person who has been on Facebook for a decade and who posts on a regular basis, for example, should have more than one or two Friends.

Industry and location

Common sense applies vis-à-vis accounts purporting to represent people living in certain locations or working in certain industries. If, for example, you work in technology and have no pets and receive a LinkedIn connection request from a veterinarian living halfway across the world whom you have never met, something may be amiss.

Likewise, if you receive a Facebook friend request from someone with whom you have nothing in common, beware.



WARNING Don't assume that any claims made in a profile are necessarily accurate and that if you share a lot in common, the sender is definitely safe. Someone targeting you may have discerned your interests from information about you that is publicly available online.

Similar people

If you receive multiple requests from people with similar titles or who claim to work for the same company and you don't know the people and aren't actively doing some sort of deal with that company, beware. If those folks don't seem to be connected to anyone else at the company

who you know actually works there, consider that a potential red flag as well.



REMEMBER You can always call, text, or email a real contact and ask whether she sees that person listed in a staff directory.

Duplicate contact

If you receive a Facebook friend request from a person who is already your Facebook friend, verify with that party that she is switching accounts. In many cases, such requests come from scammers.

Contact details

Make sure the contact details make sense. Fake people are far less likely than real people to have email addresses at real businesses and rarely have email addresses at major corporations. They're unlikely to have physical addresses that show where they live and work, and, if such addresses are listed, they rarely correspond with actual property records or phone directory information that can easily be checked online.

LinkedIn Premium status

Because LinkedIn charges for its Premium service, some experts have suggested that Premium status is a good indicator that an account is real because a criminal is unlikely to pay for an account.

While it may be true that most fake accounts don't have Premium status, some crooks do invest in obtaining Premium status in order to make their accounts seem more real. In some cases, they are paying with stolen credit cards, so it doesn't cost them anything anyway. So, remain vigilant even if an account is showing the Premium icon.

LinkedIn endorsements

Fake people are not going to be endorsed by many real people. And the endorsers of fake accounts may be other fake accounts that seem suspicious as well.

Group activity

Fake profiles are less likely than real people to be members of closed groups that verify members when they join and are less likely to participate in meaningful discussions in both closed and open groups on Facebook or LinkedIn. If they are members of closed groups, those groups may have been created and managed by scammers and contain other fake profiles as well.

Fake folks may be members of many open groups — groups that were joined in order to access member lists and connect with other participants with “I see we are members of the same group, so let’s connect” type messages.



WARNING In any case, keep in mind that on any social platform that has groups, being members of the same group as someone else is not, in any way, a reason to accept a connection from that person.

Appropriate levels of relative usage

Real people who use LinkedIn or Facebook heavily enough to have joined many groups are more likely to have filled out all their profile information. A connection request from a person who is a member of many groups but has little profile information is suspicious.

Likewise, an Instagram account with 20,000 followers but only two posted photos that seeks to follow your private account is suspicious for the same reason.

Human activities

Many fake accounts seem to list cliché-sounding information in their profiles, interests, and work experience sections, but contain few other details that seem to convey a true, real-life human experience.

Here are a few signs that things may not be what they seem:

- » On LinkedIn, the Recommendations, Volunteering Experience, and Education sections of a fake person may seem off.
- » On Facebook, a fake profile may seem to be cookie cutter and the posts generic enough in nature that millions of people could have made the same post.
- » On Twitter, they may be retweeting posts from others and never share their own opinions, comments, or other original material.
- » On Instagram the photos may be lifted from other accounts or appear to be stock photos — sometimes none of which include an image of the actual person who allegedly owns the accounts.



TIP The content within a user's social media profile may provide terms and phrases that you can search for in Google along with the person's name to help you verify whether the account truly belongs to a human being whose identity the profile alleges to represent.

Likewise, if you perform a Google image search on someone's Instagram images and see that they belong to other people, something is amiss.

Cliché names

Some fake profiles seem to use common, flowing American names, such as Sally Smith, that both sound overly American and make performing a Google search for a particular person far more difficult than doing so would be for someone with an uncommon name.



TIP More often than occurs in real life, but certainly not always, bogus profiles seem to use first and last names that start with the same letter. Perhaps, scammers just like the names or, for some reason, find them funny.

Poor contact information

If a social media profile contains absolutely no contact information that can be used to contact the person behind the profile via email, telephone, or on another social platform, beware.

Skill sets

If skill sets don't match someone's work or life experience, beware. Something may seem off when it comes to fake accounts. For example, if someone claims to have graduated with a degree in English from an Ivy League university, but makes serious grammatical errors throughout his profile, something may be amiss.

Likewise, if someone claims to have two PhDs in mathematics, but claims to be working as a gym teacher, beware.

Spelling

Spelling errors are common on social media. However, something may be amiss if someone misspells her own name or the name of an employer, or makes errors of this nature on LinkedIn (a professionally oriented network).

Suspicious career or life path

People who seem to have been promoted too often and too fast or who have held too many disparate senior positions, such as VP of Sales, then CTO, and then General Counsel, may be too good to be true.

Of course, real people have moved up the ladder quickly and some folks (including myself) have held a variety of different positions throughout the course of their careers, but scammers often overdo it when crafting the career progression or role diversity data of a bogus profile. People may shift from technical to managerial roles, for example, but it is extremely uncommon for someone to serve as a company's VP of Sales, then as its CTO, and then as its General Counsel — roles that require different skill sets, educational backgrounds, and potentially, different certifications and licenses.



TIP If you find yourself saying to yourself “no way” when looking at someone’s career path, you may be right.

Level or celebrity status

LinkedIn requests from people at far more senior professional levels than yourself can be a sign that something is amiss, as can Facebook requests from celebrities and others about whose connection request you’re flattered to have received.

It is certainly tempting to want to accept such connections (which is, of course, why the people who create fake accounts often create such fake accounts), but think about it: If you just landed your first job out of college, do you really think the CEO of a major bank is suddenly interested in connecting with you out of the blue? Do you really think that Ms. Universe, whom you have never met, suddenly wants to be your friend?

In the case of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, be aware that most celebrity accounts are verified. If a request comes in from a celebrity, you should be able to quickly discern if the account sending it is the real deal.

Using Bogus Information

Some experts have suggested that you use bogus information as answers to common challenge questions. Someone — especially someone whose mother has a common last name as her maiden name — may establish a new mother’s maiden name to be used for all sites that ask for such information as part of an authentication process. There is truth to the fact that such an approach somewhat helps reduce the risk of social engineering.

What it does even stronger, though, is reveal how poor challenge questions are as a means of authenticating people. Asking one’s mother’s

maiden name is effectively asking for a password while providing a hint that the password is a last name!

Likewise, because in the era of social media and online public records, finding out someone's birthday is relatively simple, some security experts recommend creating a second fake birthday for use online. Some even recommend using a phony birthday on social media, both to help prevent social engineering and make it harder for organizations and individuals to correlate one's social media profile and various public records.

While all these recommendations do carry weight, keep in mind that, in theory, there is no end to such logic — establishing a different phony birthday for every site with which one interacts offers stronger privacy protections than establishing just one phony birthday, for example.

In general, however, having one fake birthday, one fake mother's maiden name, and so on is probably worthwhile and doesn't require much additional brainpower and mindshare over using just the real one. Be sure, however, not to mislead any sites where providing accurate information is required by law (for example, when opening a credit card account).

Using Security Software

Besides providing the value of protecting your computer and your phone from hacking, various security software may reduce your exposure to social engineering attacks. Some software, for example, filters out many phishing attacks, while other software blocks many spam phone calls. While using such software is wise, don't rely on it. There is a danger that if few social engineering attacks make it through your technological defenses, you may be less vigilant when one does reach you — don't let that happen.

While smartphone providers have historically charged for some security features, over time they have seen the value to themselves of keeping their customers secure. Today, basic versions of security software,

including technology to reduce spam calls, are often provided at no charge along with smartphone cellular-data service.

General Cyberhygiene Can Help Prevent Social Engineering

Practicing good cyberhygiene in general can also help reduce your exposure to social engineering. If your children, for example, have access to your computer but you encrypt all your data, have a separate login, and don't provide them with administrator access, your data on the machine may remain safe even if a criminal social engineers his way into your child's account.

Likewise, not responding to suspicious emails or providing information to potential scammers who solicit it can help prevent all sorts of social engineering and technical attacks.

Part 4

**Cybersecurity for Businesses
and Organizations**

IN THIS PART ...

Find out how securing businesses against cyber-risks is different than protecting just individuals.

Discover the cybersecurity risks that face small businesses and ideas for mitigating against them.

Understand how big corporations and government bodies differ from small businesses when it comes to cybersecurity.

Chapter 9

Securing Your Small Business

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Remaining cybersecure as a small business
 - » Dealing with employees
 - » Understanding important regulations and standards
-

Nearly everything I discuss in this book applies to both individuals and businesses. Small business owners and workers should be aware of some other points that may not necessarily be important for individuals. This chapter discusses some of these cybersecurity issues. I could write an entire series of books about improving the cybersecurity of small businesses. As such, this chapter isn't a comprehensive list of everything that every small business needs to know. Rather, it provides food for thought for those running small businesses.

Making Sure Someone Is in Charge

Individuals at home are responsible for the security of their computers, but what happens when you have a network and multiple users? Somebody within the business needs to ultimately “own” responsibility for information security. That person may be you, the business owner, or someone else. But whoever is in charge must clearly understand that he or she is responsible.

In many cases of small businesses, the person in charge of information security will outsource some of the day-to-day activities. Even so, that person is ultimately responsible for ensuring that necessary activities, such as installing security patches, happen — and happen on time. If a breach occurs, “I thought so-and-so was taking care of that security function” is not an excuse that will carry a lot of weight.

Watching Out for Employees

Employees, and the many cybersecurity risks that they create, can become major headaches for small businesses. Human errors are the No. 1 catalyst for data breaches. Even if you're reading this book and seeking to improve your cybersecurity knowledge and posture, your employees and coworkers may not have the same level of commitment as you do when it comes to protecting data and systems.

As such, one of the most important things that a small business owner can do is to educate his or her employees. Education consists of essentially three necessary components:

- » **Awareness of threats:** You must ensure that every employee working for the business understands that he or she, and the business as a whole, are targets. People who believe that criminals want to breach their computers, phones, and databases act differently than people who have not internalized this reality. While formal, regular training is ideal, even a single, short conversation conducted when workers start, and refreshed with periodic reminders, can deliver significant value in this regard.
- » **Basic information-security training:** All employees should understand certain basics of information security. They should, for example, know to avoid cyber-risky behavior, such as opening attachments and clicking on links found in unexpected email messages, downloading music or videos from questionable sources, inappropriately using public Wi-Fi for sensitive tasks, or buying products from unknown stores with “too-good-to-be-true” prices and no publicly known physical address. (See [Chapter 20](#) for tips on how to safely use public Wi-Fi.)

Numerous related training materials (often free) are available online. That said, never rely on training in itself to serve as the sole line of defense against any substantial human risk. Many people do stupid things even after receiving clear training to the contrary.

Furthermore, training does nothing to address rogue employees who intentionally sabotage information security.

- » **Practice:** Information security training should not be theoretical. Employees should be given the opportunity to practice what they have learned — for example, by identifying and deleting/reporting a test phishing email.

Incentivize employees

Just as you should hold employees accountable for their actions if things go amiss, you should also reward employees for performing their jobs in a cyber-secure fashion and acting with proper cyberhygiene. Positive reinforcement can go a long way and is almost always better received than negative reinforcement.

Furthermore, many organizations have successfully implemented reporting systems that allow employees to anonymously notify the relevant powers within the business of suspicious insider activities that may indicate a threat, as well as potential bugs in systems, that could lead to vulnerabilities. Such programs are common among larger businesses, but can be of benefit to many small companies as well.

Avoid giving out the keys to the castle

There are countless stories of employees making mistakes that open the organizational door to hackers and of disgruntled employees stealing data and/or sabotaging systems. The damage from such incidents can be catastrophic to a small business. Protect yourself and your business from these types of risks by setting up your information infrastructure to contain the damage if something does go amiss.



TIP How can you do this? Give workers access to all the computer systems and data that they need in order to do their jobs with maximum performance, but do not give them access to anything else of a sensitive nature. Programmers shouldn't be able to access a business's payroll system, for example, and a comptroller doesn't need access to the version control system housing the source code of a company's proprietary software.

Limiting access can make a world of difference in terms of the scope of a data leak if an employee goes rogue. Many businesses have learned this lesson the hard way. Don't become one of them.

Give everyone his or her own credentials

Every employee accessing each and every system in use by the organization should have his or her own login credentials to that system. Do not share credentials!

Implementing such a scheme improves the ability to audit people's activities (which may be necessary if a data breach or other cybersecurity event happens) and also encourages people to better protect their passwords because they know that if the account is misused, management will address the matter with them personally rather than with a team. The knowledge that a person is going to be held accountable for his or her behavior for maintaining or compromising security can work wonders in a proactive sense.

Likewise, every person should have his or her own multifactor authentication capabilities — whether that be a physical token, a code generated on his/her smartphone, and so on.

Restrict administrators

System administrators typically have superuser privileges — meaning that they may be able to access, read, delete, and modify other people's data. It is essential, therefore, that if you — the business owner — are not the only superuser, that you implement controls to monitor what an

administrator does. For example, you can log administrator actions on a separate machine that the administrator does not have access to.

Allowing access from only a specific machine in a specific location — which is sometimes not possible due to business needs — is another approach, as it allows a camera to be aimed toward that machine to record everything that the administrator does.

Limit access to corporate accounts

Your business itself may have several of its own accounts. For example, it may have social media accounts — a Facebook page, Instagram account, and a Twitter account — customer support, email accounts, phone accounts, and other utility accounts.



REMEMBER Grant access only to the people who absolutely need access to those accounts (see preceding section). Ideally, every one of the folks to whom you do give access should have *auditable access* — that is, it should be easy to determine who did what with the account.

Basic control and audibility are simple to achieve when it comes to Facebook Pages, for example, as you can own the Facebook Page for the business, while providing other people the ability to write to the page. In some other environments, however, granular controls aren't available and you will need to decide between providing multiple people logins to a social media account or having them submit content to a single person (perhaps, even you) who makes the relevant posts.

The challenge of providing every authorized user of corporate social media accounts with his or her own account to achieve both control and audibility is exacerbated by the fact that all sensitive accounts should be protected with multifactor authentication. (See [Chapter 6](#) for more on multifactor authentication.)

Some systems offer multifactor authentication capabilities that account for the fact that multiple independent users may need to be given

auditable access to a single account. In some cases, however, systems that offer multifactor authentication capabilities do not blend well with multi-person environments. They may, for example, allow for only one cellphone number to which one-time passwords are sent via SMS. In such scenarios, you will need to decide whether to

- » Use the multifactor authentication, but with a work-around — for example, by using a VOIP number to receive the texts and configuring the VOIP number to forward the messages on to multiple parties via email (as is offered at no cost, for example, by Google Voice).
- » Use the multifactor authentication with no work-around — and configure the authorized users' devices not to need multifactor authentication for the activities that they perform.
- » Not use the multifactor authentication, but instead rely solely on strong passwords (not recommended).
- » Find another work-around by modifying your processes, procedures, or technologies used to access such systems.
- » Utilize third-party products that overlay systems (often the best option when available).



TIP The last option is often the best option. Various content management systems, for example, allow themselves to be configured for multiple users, each with his or her own independent, strong authentication capabilities, and all such users have auditable access to a single social media account.

While larger enterprises almost always follow some variant of the last approach — both for management and security reasons — many small businesses tend to take the easy way out and simply not use strong authentication in such cases. The cost of implementing proper security — both in terms of dollars and time — is usually quite low, so exploring

third-party products should definitely be done before deciding to take another approach.



REMEMBER The value of having proper security with auditability will become immediately clear if you ever have a disgruntled employee who had access to the company's social media accounts or if a happy and satisfied employee with such access is hacked.

Implementing employee policies

Businesses of all sizes that have employees need an employee handbook that includes specific rules regarding employee usage of business technology systems and data.

It is beyond the scope of this book to cover all elements of employee handbooks, but the following are examples of rules that businesses can implement to govern the use of company technology resources:

- » Company's employees are expected to use technology responsibly, appropriately, and productively, as necessary to perform their professional responsibilities.
- » The use of company devices, as well as company Internet access and email, as provided to employee by company, are for job-related activities. Minimal personal use is acceptable provided that the employee's using it as such does not violate any other rules described in this document and does not interfere with his or her work.
- » Each employee is responsible for any computer hardware and software provided to him or her by the company, including for the safeguarding of such items from theft, loss, or damage.
- » Each employee is responsible for his or her accounts provided by the company, including the safeguarding of access to the accounts.
- » Employees are strictly prohibited from sharing any company-provided items used for authentication (passwords, hardware

authentication devices, PINs, and so on) and are responsible for safeguarding such items.

- » Employees are strictly prohibited from connecting any networking devices, such as routers, access points, range extenders, and so on, to company networks unless explicitly authorized to do so by the company's CEO. Likewise, employees are strictly prohibited from connecting any personal computers or electronic devices — including any Internet of Things (IoT) devices — to company networks other than to the Guest network, under the conditions stated explicitly in the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy. (See the section on BYOD, later in this chapter.)
- » Employees are responsible to make sure that security software is running on all company-provided devices. Company will provide such software, but it is beyond company's ability to check that such systems are always functioning as expected. Employees may not deactivate or otherwise cripple such security systems, and must promptly notify company's IT department if they suspect that any portion of the security systems may be compromised, nonfunctioning, or malfunctioning.
- » Employees are responsible to make sure that security software is kept up to date. All company-issued devices come equipped with Auto-Update enabled; employees must not disable this feature.
- » Likewise, employees are responsible for keeping their devices up to date with the latest operating system, driver, and application patches when vendors issue such patches. All company-issued devices come equipped with Auto-Update enabled; employees must not disable this feature.
- » Performing any illegal activity — whether or not the act involved is a felony, a misdemeanor, or a violation of civil law — is strictly prohibited. This rule applies to federal law, state law, and local law in any area and at any time in which the employee is subject to such laws.
- » Copyrighted materials belonging to any party other than the company or employee may not be stored or transmitted by the

employee on company equipment without explicit written permission of the copyright holder. Material that the company has licensed may be transmitted as permitted by the relevant licenses.

- » Sending mass unsolicited emails (spamming) is prohibited.
- » The use of company resources to perform any task that is inconsistent with company's mission — even if such task is not technically illegal — is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, the accessing or transmitting sexually explicit material, vulgarities, hate speech, defamatory materials, discriminatory materials, images or description of violence, threats, cyberbullying, hacking-related material, stolen material, and so on.
- » The previous rule shall not apply to employees whose job entails working with such material, only to the extent that is reasonably needed for them to perform the duties of their jobs. For example, personnel responsible for configuring the company's email filter may, without violating the preceding rule, email one another about adding to the filter configuration various terms related to hate speech and vulgarities.
- » No company devices equipped with Wi-Fi or cellular communication capabilities may be turned on in China or Russia without explicit written permission from the company's CEO. Loaner devices will be made available for employees making trips to those regions. Any personal device turned on in those regions may not be connected to the Guest network (or any other company network).
- » All use of public Wi-Fi with corporate devices must comply with the company's Public Wi-Fi policies.
- » Employees must backup their computers by using the company's backup system as discussed in the company's backup policy.
- » Employees may not copy or otherwise back up data from company devices to their personal computers and/or storage devices.
- » Any and all passwords for any and all systems used as part of an employees' job must be unique and not reused on any other systems. All such passwords must consist of three or more words, at least one

of which is not found in the English dictionary, joined together with numbers or special characters or meet all the following conditions:

- Contain eight characters or more with at least one uppercase character
- Contain at least one lowercase character
- Contain at least one number
- Not contain any words that can be found in an English dictionary
- In either case, names of relatives, friends, or colleagues may not be used as part of any password.

- » Data may be taken out of the office for business purposes only and must be encrypted prior to removal. This rule applies whether the data is on hard drive, SSD, CD/DVD, USB drive, or on any other media or is transmitted over the Internet. Any and all such data must be returned to the office (or at company's sole discretion, destroyed,) immediately after its remote use is complete or upon employee's termination of employment, whichever is sooner.
- » In the event of a breach or other cybersecurity event or of any natural or man-made disaster, no employees other than the company's officially designated spokesperson may speak to the media on behalf of the company.
- » No devices from any manufacturer that the FBI or other United States federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies have warned that they believe foreign governments are using to spy on Americans may be connected to any company network (including the guest network) or brought into the physical offices of the company.

Enforcing social media policies

Devising, implementing, and enforcing social media policies is important because inappropriate social media posts made by your employees (or yourself) can inflict all sorts of damage. They can leak sensitive information, violate compliance rules, and assist criminals to

social engineer and attack your organization, expose your business to boycotts and/or lawsuits, and so on.



TIP You want to make clear to all employees what is and is not acceptable use of social media. As part of the process of crafting the policies, consider consulting an attorney to make sure that you do not violate anyone's freedom of speech. You may also want to implement technology to ensure social media does not transform from a marketing platform into a nightmare.

Monitoring employees

Regardless of whether or not they plan to actually monitor employees' usage of technology, companies should inform users that they have a right to do so. If an employee were to go rogue and steal data, for example, you do not want to have the admissibility of evidence challenged on the grounds that you had no right to monitor the employee. Furthermore, telling employees that they may be monitored reduces the likelihood of employees doing things that they are not supposed to do because they know that they may be monitored while doing such things.

Here is an example of text that you can provide to employees as part of an employee handbook or the like when they begin work:

Company, at its sole discretion, and without any further notice to employee, reserves the right to monitor, examine, review, record, collect, store, copy, transmit to others, and control any and all email and other electronic communications, files, and any and all other content, network activity including Internet use, transmitted by or through its technology systems or stored in its technology systems or systems, whether onsite or offsite. Such systems shall include systems that it owns and operates and systems that it leases, licenses, or to which it otherwise has any usage rights.

Furthermore, whether sent to an internal party, external party, or both, any and all email, text and/or other instant messages, voicemail, and/or any and all other electronic communications are considered to be Company's business records, and may be subject to discovery in the event of litigation and/or to disclosure based on warrants served upon company or requests from regulators and other parties.

Considering Cyber Insurance

While cybersecurity insurance may be overkill for most small businesses, if you believe that your business could suffer a catastrophic loss or even fail altogether if it were to be breached, you may want to consider buying insurance. If you do pursue this route, keep in mind that nearly all cybersecurity insurance policies have *carve outs*, or exclusions — so make sure that you understand exactly what is covered and what is not and for what amount of damage you are actually covered. If your business fails because you were breached, a policy that pays only to have an expert spend two hours restoring your data is not going to be worth much.



REMEMBER Cybersecurity insurance is never a replacement for proper cybersecurity. In fact, insurers normally require that a business meet a certain standard of cybersecurity to purchase and maintain coverage. In some cases, the insurer may even refuse to pay a claim if it finds that the insured party was breached at least in part due to negligence on the insured's part or due to the failure of the breached party to adhere to certain standards or practices mandated by the relevant insurance policy.

Complying with Regulations and Compliance

Businesses may be bound by various laws, contractual obligations, and industry standards when it comes to cybersecurity. Your local Small Business Administration office may be able to provide you with guidance as to what regulations potentially impact you. Remember, though, that there is no substitute for hiring a properly trained lawyer experienced with this area of law to provide professional advice optimized for your particular situation.

The following sections provide examples of several such regulations, standards, and so on that often impact small businesses.

Protecting employee data

You're responsible for protecting sensitive information about your employees. For physical files, you should, in general, protect records with at least *double-locking* — storing the paper files in a locked cabinet within a locked room (and not using the same key for both). For electronic files, the files should be stored encrypted within a password-protected folder, drive, or virtual drive. Such standards, however, may not be adequate in every particular situation, which is why you should check with an attorney.



REMEMBER Keep in mind that failure to adequately protect employee information can have severe effects: If your business is breached and a criminal obtains private information about employees, the impacted employees and former employees can potentially sue you, and the government may fine you as well. Remediation costs may also be much higher than the costs of proactive prevention would have been. And, of course, the impact of bad publicity on the business's sales may also be catastrophic.

Remember, employee personnel records, W2 forms, Social Security numbers, I9 employment eligibility forms, home addresses and phone numbers, medical information, vacation records, family leave records, and so on are all potentially considered private.



TIP In general, if you're unsure as to whether some information may be considered private, err on the side of caution and treat it as if it is private.

PCI DSS

Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) is an information security standard for organizations that handle major credit cards and their associated information.

While all companies of all sizes that are subject to the PCI DSS standard must be compliant with it, PCI does take into effect the different levels of resources available to different sized businesses. PCI Compliance has effectively four different levels. To what level an organization must comply is normally based primarily on how many credit card transactions it processes per year. Other factors, such as how risky the payments are that the company receives, also weigh in. The different levels are

- » **PCI Level 4:** Standards for businesses that process fewer than 20,000 credit card transactions per year
- » **PCI Level 3:** Standards for businesses that process between 20,000 and 1,000,000 credit card transactions per year
- » **PCI Level 2:** Standards for businesses that process between 1,000,000 and 6,000,000 credit card transactions per year
- » **PCI Level 1:** Standards for businesses that process more than 6,000,000 credit card transactions per year

Exploring PCI in detail is beyond the scope of this book. Multiple, entire books have been written on the topic. If you operate a small business and process credit card payments or store credit card data for any other reason, be sure to engage someone knowledgeable in PCI to help guide you. In many cases, your credit card processors will be able to recommend a proper consultant or guide you themselves.

Breach disclosure laws

In recent years, various jurisdictions have enacted so-called *breach disclosure laws*, which require businesses to disclose to the public if they suspect that a breach may have endangered certain types of stored information. Breach disclosure laws vary quite a bit from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but, in some cases, they may apply even to the smallest of businesses.



REMEMBER Be sure that you are aware of the laws that apply to your business. If, for some reason, you do suffer a breach, the last thing that you want is the government punishing you for not handling the breach properly. Remember: Many small businesses fail as the result of a breach; the government entering the fray only worsens your business's odds of surviving.

The laws that apply to your business may include not only those of the jurisdiction within which you're physically located but the jurisdictions of the people you're handling information for.

GDPR

The *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) is a European privacy regulation that went into effect in 2018 and applies to all businesses handling the consumer data of residents of the European Union, no matter the size, industry, or country of origin of the business and no matter whether the EU resident is physically located within the EU. It provides for stiff fines for businesses that do not properly protect private information belonging to EU residents. This regulation means that a small business in New York that sells an item to an EU resident located in New York may be subject to GDPR for information about the purchaser and, can, in theory, face stiff penalties if it fails to properly protect that person's data. For example, in July 2019, the United Kingdom's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) announced that it intended to fine British Airways about \$230 million and Marriott about \$123 million for GDPR-related violations stemming from data breaches.

GDPR is complex. If you think that your business may be subject to GDPR, speak with an attorney who handles such matters.



TIP Do not panic about GDPR. Even if a small business in the United States is technically subject to GDPR, it is unlikely that the EU will attempt to fine small American businesses that do not operate in Europe anytime soon; it has much bigger fish to fry. That said, do not ignore GDPR because eventually American small businesses may become targets for enforcement actions.

HIPAA

Federal law throughout the United States of America requires parties that house healthcare-related information to protect it in order to maintain the privacy of the individuals whose medical information appears in the data. The *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act* (HIPAA), which went into effect in 1996, provides for stiff penalties for improperly defending such information. Be sure to learn whether HIPAA applies to your business and, if so, ensure that you are properly protecting the data to which it applies according to industry standards or better.

Biometric data

If you utilize any forms of biometric authentication or for any other reason store biometric data, you may be subject to various privacy and security laws governing that data. Multiple states have already enacted laws in this regard, and others are likely to follow.

Handling Internet Access

Small businesses face significant challenges related to Internet access and information systems that individuals rarely must think about, and must take various actions to prevent the emergence of various dangers. The following sections cover a few examples.

Segregate Internet access for personal devices

If you provide Internet access for visitors to your place of business, and/or for your employees to use with their personal smartphones and tablets while at work, implement this Internet access on a separate network from the network(s) used to run your business (see [Figure 9-1](#)). Most modern routers offer such a capability, which is usually found somewhere in the configuration with a name like Guest network.

The screenshot shows a 'Guest Network Settings' configuration page. At the top are 'CANCEL' and 'APPLY' buttons. Under 'Wireless Settings', 'Enable Guest Network' and 'Enable SSID Broadcast' are checked, while 'Allow guests to see each other and access my local network' is unchecked. The 'Guest Wireless Network Name (SSID)' is set to 'Guest'. In the 'Security Options' section, 'WPA2-PSK [AES]' is selected. Below that, under 'Security Options (WPA2-PSK)', a password 'CyberSecurityForDummies' is entered, with a note that it must be 8-63 characters or 64 hex digits long.

FIGURE 9-1: Configuring a guest network for connecting nonbusiness machines to the Internet.

Bring your own device (BYOD)

If you allow employees to perform business activities on their own personal laptops or mobile devices, you need to create policies regarding such activity and implement technology to protect your data in such an environment.



WARNING Don't rely on policies. If you don't enforce policies with technology, you could suffer a catastrophic theft of data if an employee goes rogue or makes a mistake.

In general, small businesses should not allow bring your own device (BYOD) — even if doing so is tempting. In the vast majority of cases when small businesses do allow employees to use their own devices for work-related activities, data remains improperly protected, and problems develop if an employee leaves the organization (especially if he or she leaves under less than optimal circumstances).



TIP Many Android keyboards “learn” about a user’s activities as he or she types. While such learning helps improve spelling correction and word prediction, it also means that in many cases, sensitive corporate information may be learned on a personal device and remain as suggested content when a user types on it even after he leaves his or her employer.

If you do allow BYOD, be sure to set proper policies and procedures — both for usage and for decommissioning any company technology on such devices, as well as for removing any company data when an employee leaves. Develop a full mobile device security plan that includes remote wipe capabilities, enforces protection of passwords and other sensitive data, processes work-related data in an isolated area of the device that other apps can’t access (a process known as *sandboxing*), installs, runs, and updates mobile-optimized security software, prohibits staff from using public Wi-Fi for sensitive work-related tasks, prohibits certain activities from the devices while corporate data is on them, and so on.

Handling inbound access

One of the biggest differences between individuals and businesses using the Internet is often the need of the business to provide inbound access for untrusted parties. Unknown parties must be able to initiate communications that result in communications with internal servers within your business.

For example, if a business offers products for sale online, it must allow untrusted parties to access its website to make purchases (see [Figure 9-2](#)). Those parties connect to the website, which must connect to payment systems and internal order tracking systems, even though they are untrusted. (Individuals typically do not have to allow any such inbound access to their computers.)

Home user

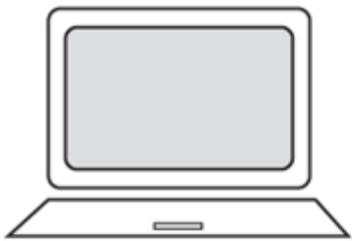


1. Request goes out to server on Internet



2. Server responds

Business user



1. Request goes out to server on Internet

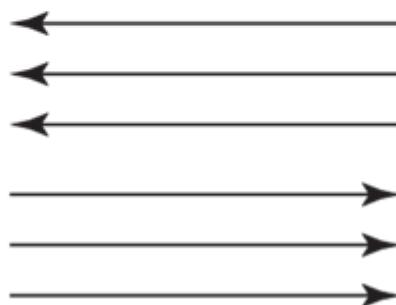


2. Server responds

Website



1. Users send in refresh



2. Server responds

FIGURE 9-2: Inbound access is one major difference between businesses and individuals.

While small businesses can theoretically properly secure web servers, email servers, and so on, the reality is that few, if any, small businesses have the resources to adequately do so, unless they're in the

cybersecurity business to begin with. As such, it is wise for small businesses to consider using third-party software and infrastructure, set up by an expert, and managed by experts, to host any systems used for inbound access. To do so, a business may assume any one or more of several approaches:

- » **Utilize a major retailer's website.** If you're selling items online, and sell only through the websites of major retailers, such as Amazon, Rakuten, and/or eBay, those sites serve as a major buffer between your business's systems and the outside world. The security armies at those companies defend their customer-facing systems from attacks. In many cases, such systems don't require small businesses to receive inbound communications, and when they do, the communications emanate from those retailers' systems, not from the public. Of course, many factors go into deciding whether to sell via a major retailer — online markets do take hefty commissions, for example. When you weigh the factors in making such a decision, keep the security advantages in mind.
- » **Utilize a third-party hosted retail platform.** In such a case, the third party manages most of the infrastructure and security for you, but you customize and manage the actual online store. Such a model does not offer quite the same level of isolation from outside users as does the preceding model, but it does offer much greater buffering against attacks than if you operate your own platform by yourself. Shopify is an example of a popular third-party platform.
- » **Operate your own platform, hosted by a third party that is also responsible for security.** This approach offers better protection than managing the security yourself, but it does not isolate your code from outsiders trying to find vulnerabilities and attack. It also places responsibility for the upkeep and security of the platform on you.
- » **Operate your own system hosted either internally or externally and use a managed services provider to manage your security.** In such a case, you're fully responsible for the security of the platform and infrastructure, but you're outsourcing much of the actual work required to satisfy that responsibility to a third party.

Other models and many variants of the models I list exist as well.

While the models may step from easier to secure to harder to secure, they also step from less customizable to more customizable. In addition, while the earlier models may cost less for smaller businesses, the expense of the earlier models typically grows much faster than do the later ones as a business grows.



TIP While using third-party providers does add some risks; the risk that a small business will be unable to properly implement and perpetually manage security is likely much greater than any security risk created by using a reliable third party. Of course, outsourcing anything to an unknown third party that you have done no due diligence on is extremely risky and is not recommended.

Protecting against denial-of-service attacks

If you operate any Internet-facing sites as part of your business, make sure that you have security technology implemented to protect against denial-of-service type attacks. If you're selling via retailers, they likely have it already. If you're using a third-party cloud platform, the provider may supply it as well. If you're running the site on your own, you should obtain protection to ensure that someone can't easily take your site — and your business — offline.

Use https for your website

If your business operates a website, be sure to install a valid TLS/SSL certificate so that users can communicate with it over a secure connection and know that the site actually belongs to your business.



TIP Some security systems that protect against denial-of-service attacks include a certificate as part of the package.

Providing remote access to systems

If you intend on providing employees remote access to corporate systems, consider using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) and multifactor authentication. In the case of remote access, the VPN should create an encrypted tunnel between your remote users and your business, not between users and a VPN provider. The tunnel both protects against people snooping on the communications between remote users and the business and also allows remote users to function as if they were in the company's offices, and utilize various business resources available only to insiders. Multifactor authentication is discussed in detail in [Chapter 6](#).

Of course, if you use third-party, cloud-based systems, the relevant providers should already have security capabilities deployed that you can leverage — do so.

Running penetration tests

Individuals rarely run tests to see whether hackers can penetrate into their systems, and neither do most small businesses. Doing so, however, can be valuable — especially if you are deploying a new system of some sort or upgrading network infrastructure. See [Chapter 16](#) for more on penetration testing.

Being careful with IoT devices

Many businesses today utilize connected cameras, alarms, and so on. Be sure that someone is responsible for overseeing the security of these devices, which should be run on separate networks (or virtual segments) than any computers used to operate the business. Control access to these devices and do not allow employees to connect any unauthorized IoT devices to the business's networks. For more on IoT devices, see [Chapter 17](#).

Using multiple network segments

Depending on the size and nature of your business, isolating various computers onto different network segments may be wise. A software development company, for example, should not have developers coding on the same network that the operations folks use to manage payroll and accounts payable.

Being careful with payment cards

If you accept credit and/or debit cards — and are not selling via a major retailer's website — make sure to speak with your processor about various anti-fraud technology options that may be available to you.

Managing Power Issues

Use an uninterruptable power supply on all systems that you can't afford to have go down even momentarily. Also, make sure the power supplies can keep the systems up and running for longer than any expected outage. If you're selling various goods and services via online retail, for example, you may lose current sales and future sales, as well as suffer reputational harm, if your ability to sell goes offline even for a short period of time.

LOCKING ALL NETWORKING EQUIPMENT AND SERVERS IN A VENTILATED CLOSET

You must control physical access to your systems and data if you want to protect them from unauthorized access. While individuals typically store computers in the open in their homes, businesses usually keep servers in locked racks or closets. You need to be sure, though, that any such rack or closet where you locate computer equipment is well ventilated, or your equipment may overheat and die. You may even need to install a small air conditioner in the closet if ventilation on its own does not sufficiently get rid of the heat generated by the equipment.



WARNING Never let cleaning personnel enter the server closet unaccompanied — even for a moment. The author personally witnessed a case in which a server used by dozens of people went down because an administrator allowed cleaning personnel to enter a server room unaccompanied only to find later that someone unplugged a server from an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) — a device that serves as both the entry point for power into the system as well as a battery backup — to plug in a vacuum cleaner.

Chapter 10

Cybersecurity and Big Businesses

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing the differences between large enterprise information security and small business information security
 - » Understanding the CISO role
 - » Exploring the regulations and standards that impact large enterprises
-

Many of the information security challenges facing large enterprises and small business are the same. In fact, over the past decade, cloud-based offerings have brought to small businesses many well-protected systems with enterprise-class technologies, reducing some of the historical differences between the firms of different sizes as far as the architecture of some systems is concerned.

Of course, many security risks scale with enterprise size, but don't qualitatively differ based on the number of employees, partners, and customers that a business has or the size of its information technology budget.

At the same time, however, bigger companies often face significant additional complications — sometimes involving orders of magnitude more complexity than the cybersecurity challenges facing small businesses. A large number of diverse systems, often spread across geographies, with custom code and so on, often make securing a large enterprise quite difficult and complex.

Thankfully, however, larger firms tend to have significantly larger budgets to acquire defenses and defenders. Furthermore, despite the fact

that all companies should, in theory, have formal information security programs, small business tend not to, while large businesses almost always do.

This chapter explores some areas that disproportionately impact large companies.

Utilizing Technological Complexity

Large enterprises often have multiple offices and lines of business, many different information systems, complex business arrangements with partners and suppliers, and so on — all of which are reflected in much more complicated information infrastructure than typically exists in the case of smaller businesses. As such, large companies have a much larger *attack surface* — that is, they have many more potential points of attack than do small businesses — and the varied systems mean that no individual, or even small number of people, can possibly be experts on addressing all of them. Large firms use a blend of cloud and local systems, of commercial-off-the-shelf and custom-built systems, a blend of technologies, complex network architectures, and so on — and their security teams must make sure that all of these work together in a secure fashion.

Managing Custom Systems

Large enterprises almost always have significant amounts of custom-built technology systems that are managed in-house. Depending on how they are deployed and utilized, these systems may require the same level of security patching that off-the-shelf software requires — which means that internal folks need to maintain the code from a security perspective, push out patches, and so on.

Furthermore, security teams must be involved with internal systems throughout the systems' entire life cycle — including phases such as initial investigation, analysis and requirements definition, design,

development, integration and testing, acceptance and deployment, ongoing operations, and maintenance, evaluation, and disposal.

Security as an element of software development is a complicated matter. Entire books are written about delivering security during the software development life cycle, and professional certifications are awarded specifically in this area as well.

Continuity Planning and Disaster Recovery

While small businesses should have business continuity and disaster recovery plans (sometimes known as BCPs and DRPs) and should regularly test those plans as well, they typically have, at least from a formal perspective, rudimentary plans — at best. Large businesses typically have much more formal plans — including detailed arrangements for resumption of work in case a facility becomes unavailable and so on. Entire books cover disaster recovery and continuity planning — testaments to the complexity and robustness of the relevant processes.

Looking at Regulations

Large enterprises are often subject to many more regulations, laws, guidance, and industry standards than are small businesses. Besides all the issues that are described in the chapter on securing small businesses, for example, the following sections cover some other ones that may impact large enterprises.

Sarbanes Oxley

The Sarbanes Oxley Act of 2002, technically known as either the Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act or the Corporate and Auditing Accountability, Responsibility, and Transparency Act, established many rules intended to help protect investors in public companies. Many of its mandates, for example, are

intended to improve the accuracy, objectivity, and reliability of corporate statements and disclosures and to create formal systems of internal checks and balances within companies. SOX, as it is often known, mandated stronger corporate governance rules, closed various accounting loopholes, strengthened protections for whistle-blowers, and created substantial penalties (including jail time) for corporate and executive malfeasance.

As its name implies, all publicly held American companies are subject to SOX, as are companies outside of the United States that have registered any equity or debt securities with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Additionally, any third party, such as an accounting firm, that provides accounting or other financial services to companies regulated by SOX, is itself mandated to comply with SOX, regardless of its location.

SOX has many implications on information security — both directly and indirectly. Two sections of SOX effectively mandate that companies implement various information security protections:

- » **Section 302** of SOX addresses the corporate responsibility to utilize controls to ensure that the firm produces accurate financial reports and requires companies to implement systems to prevent any unauthorized tampering with corporate data used to create such reports — whether the tampering is done by employees or external folks.
- » **Section 404** is perhaps the most controversial portion of SOX and certainly, for many businesses, the most expensive with which to comply. This section makes corporate managers responsible to ensure that the company has adequate and effective internal control structures and requires that any relevant shortcomings be reported to the public. Section 404 makes management responsible to ensure that the corporation can properly protect its data processing systems and their contents and mandates that the firm must make all relevant data available to auditors, including information about any potential security breaches.

In addition to these two areas in which SOX plays a role, information security professionals are likely to deal with many other systems that companies have implemented in order to comply with other SOX requirements. Such systems need protection as well as they themselves must adhere to SOX, too.

SOX is complicated — and public companies normally employ people who are experts in the relevant requirements. Information security professionals are likely to interface with such folks.

Stricter PCI requirements

The PCI DSS standards for protecting credit card information (see [Chapter 9](#)) include stricter mandates for larger companies (for example, those processing more credit card transactions) than for smaller firms. Also, keep in mind that from a practical perspective, larger firms are likely to have more processing terminals and more credit card data, as well as more diverse technology involved in their credit card processing processes — raising the stakes when it comes to PCI. Larger firms also face a greater risk of reputational damage: A violation of PCI DSS standards by a larger firm is far more likely to make the national news than if the same violation were made by a mom-and-pop shop.

Public company data disclosure rules

Public companies — that is, businesses owned by the public via their shares being listed on a stock exchange (or on various other public trading platforms) — are subject to numerous rules and regulations intended to protect the integrity of the markets.

One such requirement is that the company must release to the entire world at the same time various types of information that may impact the value of the company's shares. The firm can't, for example, provide such information to investment banks before disclosing it to the media. In fact, anyone to whom the firm does release the information prior to the disclosure to the public — for example, the public company's accounting or law firms — is strictly prohibited from trading shares or any derivative based on them based on that data.

As such, large corporations often have all sorts of policies, procedures, and technologies in place to protect any data subject to such regulations — and to address situations in which some such data was inadvertently released.

Breach disclosures

Some breach disclosure rules exempt smaller businesses, but all require disclosures from large enterprises. Furthermore, large enterprises often have multiple departments that must interact and coordinate in order to release information about a breach — sometimes also involving external parties. Representatives of the marketing, investor relations, information technology, security, legal, and other departments, for example, may need to work together to coordinate the text of any release and may need to involve a third-party public relations firm and external counsel as well. Large enterprises also tend to have official spokespersons and media departments to which the press can address any questions.

Industry-specific regulators and rules

Various industry-specific rules and regulations tend to apply to larger firms more often than to small businesses.

For example, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which is an independent federal agency that regulates nuclear power companies in the United States, regulates some major utilities, but few, if any, mom-and-pop shops will ever be subject to its regulations. Hence, only larger firms dedicate significant resources to ensuring compliance with its rules. In the world of NRC regulations, cybersecurity is an important element in governing various Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition systems (SCADA), which are computer-based control and management systems that speak to the controllers in components of a plant.

Likewise, with the exception of certain hedge funds and other financial operations, few small businesses are required to monitor and record all the social media interactions of their employees, the way major banks must do for certain workers.

As a result of industry specific regulations, many large businesses have various processes, policies, and technologies in place that yield data and

systems requiring all sorts of information security involvement.

Fiduciary responsibilities

While many small businesses don't have external shareholders to whom management or a board of directors may be fiduciarily responsible, most large corporations do have investors who may sue either or both parties if a cybersecurity breach harms the firm's value. Various laws require management and boards to ensure that systems are appropriately secured. In some cases, folks may even be able to be criminally charged if they were negligent. Even if senior executives are not charged after a breach, they may still suffer severe career and reputational damage for their failure to prevent it.

Deep pockets

Because large enterprises have much deeper pockets than small businesses — in other words, they have a lot more money at their disposal — and because targeting mom-and-pop shops isn't usually as politically advantageous as targeting a large firm that exhibited some bad behavior, regulators tend to pursue compliance cases against large enterprises suspected of violations with much more gusto than they do against small businesses.

Deeper Pockets — and Insured

Because larger organizations are more likely to have large amounts of cash and assets than small businesses, they make better targets for class action and various other forms of lawsuits than do mom-and-pop shops. Lawyers don't want to expend large amounts of time fighting a case if their target has no money with which to settle or may go bankrupt (and therefore not pay) in the case of a judgment.

As a result, the odds that a larger enterprise will be targeted with a lawsuit if data leaks from it as a result of a breach are relatively high when compared with the odds that the same would happen to a much smaller business suffering a similar breach.

Considering Employees, Consultants, and Partners

Employees are often the weakest link in a business's security chain. Far more complex employment arrangements utilized by large enterprises — often involving unionized employees, non-unionized employees, directly hired contractors, contractors hired through firms, subcontractors, and so on — threaten to make the problem even worse for larger business.

Complexity of any sort increases the odds of people making mistakes. With human errors being the No. 1 catalyst for data breaches, large enterprises must go beyond the human management processes and procedures of small businesses. They must, for example, have streamlined processes for deciding who gets to access what and who can give authorization for what. They must establish simple processes for revoking permissions from diverse systems when employees leave, contractors complete their assignments, and so on.

Revoking access from departing parties is not as simple as many people might imagine. An employee of a large corporation might, for example, have access to multiple, unconnected data systems located in many different locations around the globe and that are managed by different teams from different departments. Identity and access management systems that centralize parts of the authentication and authorization processes can help, but many large enterprises still lack the totally comprehensive centralization necessary to make revoking access a single-step process.

Dealing with internal politics

While all businesses with more than one employee have some element of politics, large businesses can suffer from conflicts between people and groups that are literally incentivized to perform in direct opposition to one another. For example, a business team may be rewarded if it delivers new product features earlier than a certain date — which it can do more easily if it skimps on security — while the information security team

may be incentivized to delay the product release because it's incentivized to ensure that there are no security problems and not to get the product to market quickly.

Offering information security training

All employees should understand certain basics of information security. They should, for example, know to avoid cyber-risky behavior, such as opening attachments and clicking on links found in unexpected email messages, downloading music or videos from questionable sources, inappropriately using public Wi-Fi for sensitive tasks, or buying products from unknown stores with “too good to be true” prices and no publicly known physical address.

In large firms, however, most employees do not personally know most other employees. Such a situation opens the door for all sorts of social engineering attacks — bogus requests from management to send W2s, bogus requests from the IT department to reset passwords, and so on. Training and practice to make sure that such attacks cannot successfully achieve their aims are critical.

Replicated environments

Larger businesses often replicate environments not only in order to protect against outages, but also for maintenance purposes. As such, they often have three replicas for every major system in place: the production system (which may be replicated itself for redundancy purposes), a development environment, and a staging environment for running tests of code and patches.

Looking at the Chief Information Security Officer's Role

While all businesses need someone within them to ultimately own responsibility for information security, larger enterprises often have large teams involved with information security and need someone who can oversee all the various aspects of information security management, as

well as manage all the personnel involved in doing so. This person also represents the information security function to senior management — and sometimes to the board. Typically that person is the chief information security officer (CISO).

While the exact responsibilities of CISOs vary by industry, geography, company size, corporate structure, and pertinent regulations, most CISO roles share basic commonalities.

In general, the CISO's role includes overseeing and assuming responsibility for all areas of information security. The following sections describe those areas.

Overall security program management

The CISO is responsible to oversee the company's security program from A to Z. This role includes not only establishing the information security policies for the enterprise, but everything needed to ensure that business objectives can be achieved with the desired level of risk management — something that requires performing risk assessments, for example, on a regular basis.

While, in theory, small businesses also have someone responsible for their entire security programs, in the case of large enterprises, the programs are usually much more formal, with orders of magnitude more moving parts. Such programs are also forever ongoing.

Test and measurement of the security program

The CISO is responsible to establish proper testing procedures and success metrics against which to measure the effectiveness of the information security plan and to make adjustments accordingly.

Establishing proper security metrics is often far more complicated than one might initially assume, as defining “successful performance” when it comes to information security is not a straightforward matter.

Human risk management

The CISO is responsible for addressing various human risks as well. Screening employees before hiring them, defining roles and responsibilities, training employees, providing employees with

appropriate user manuals and employee guides, providing employees with information security breach simulations and feedback, creating incentive programs, and so on all often involve the participation of the CISO's organization.

Information asset classification and control

This function of the CISO includes performing an inventory of informational assets, devising an appropriate classification system, classifying the assets, and then deciding what types of controls (at a business level) need to be in place to adequately secure the various classes and assets. Auditing and accountability should be included in the controls as well.

Security operations

Security operations means exactly what it sounds like. It is the business function that includes the real-time management of security, including the analysis of threats, and the monitoring of a company's technology assets (systems, networks, databases, and so on) and information security countermeasures, such as firewalls, whether hosted internally or externally, for anything that may be amiss. Operations personnel are also the folks who initially respond if they do find that something has potentially gone wrong.

Information security strategy

This role includes devising the forward-looking security strategy of the company to keep the firm secure as it heads into the future. Proactive planning and action is a lot more comforting to shareholders than reacting to attacks.

Identity and access management

This role deals with controlling access to informational assets based on business requirements, and includes identity management, authentication, authorization, and related monitoring. It includes all aspects of the company's password management policies and technologies, any and all multifactor authentication policies and systems,

and any directory systems that store lists of people and groups and their permissions.

The CISO's identity and access management teams are responsible to give workers access to the systems needed to perform the workers' jobs and to revoke all such access when a worker leaves. Likewise, they manage partner access and all other external access.

Major corporations almost always utilize formal directory services type systems — Active Directory, for example, is quite popular.

Data loss prevention

Data loss prevention includes policies, procedures, and technologies that prevent proprietary information from leaking. Leaks can happen accidentally — for example, a user may accidentally attach the wrong document to an email before sending the message — or through malice (for example, a disgruntled employee steals valuable intellectual property by copying it to a USB drive and taking the drive home just before resigning).

In recent years, some social media management functions have been moved into the data loss prevention group. After all, oversharing on social media often includes the de facto sharing by employees of information that businesses do not want going out onto publicly accessible social networks.

Fraud prevention

Some forms of fraud prevention often fall in the CISO's domain. For example, if a company operates consumer-facing websites that sell products, it is often part of the CISO's responsibility to minimize the number of fraudulent transactions that are made on the sites. Even when such responsibility doesn't fall within the purview of the CISO, the CISO is likely to be involved in the process, as anti-fraud systems and information security systems often mutually benefit from sharing information about suspicious users.

Besides dealing with combatting fraudulent transactions, the CISO may be responsible for implementing technologies to prevent rogue

employees from stealing money from the company via one or more of many types of schemes — with the CISO usually focusing primarily on means involving computers.

Incident response plan

The CISO is responsible to develop and maintain the company's incident response plan. The plan should include not only the technical steps described in [Chapters 11](#) and [12](#), but also detail who speaks to the media, who clears messages with the media, who informs the public, who informs regulators, who consults with law enforcement, and so on. It should also detail the identities (specified by job description) and roles of all other decision-makers within the incident response process.

Disaster recovery and business continuity planning

This function includes managing disruptions of normal operations through contingency planning and the testing of all such plans.

While large businesses often have a separate DR and BCP team, the CISO almost always plays a major role in these functions — if not owns them outright —for multiple reasons:

- » **Keeping systems and data available is part of the CISO's responsibility.** As such, there is little difference from a practical perspective if a system goes down because a DR and BC plan is ineffective or because a DDoS attack hit — if systems and data are not available, it is the CISO's problem.
- » **CISOs need to make sure that BCP and DR plans provide for recovery in such a manner that security is preserved.** This is especially true because it is often obvious from major media news stories when major corporations may need to activate their continuity plans, and hackers know that companies in recovery mode make ideal targets.

Compliance

The CISO is responsible to ensure that the company complies with all with legal and regulatory requirements, contractual obligations, and best practices accepted by the company as related to information security. Of course, compliance experts and attorneys may advise the CISO regarding such matters, but ultimately, it is the CISO's responsibility to ensure that all requirements are met.

Investigations

If (and when) an information security incident occurs, the folks working for the CISO in this capacity investigate what happened. In many cases, they'll be the folks who coordinate investigations with law enforcement agencies, consulting firms, regulators, or third-party security companies. These teams must be skilled in forensics and in preserving evidence. It does little good to know that some rogue employee stole money or data if, as a result of mishandling digital evidence, you can't prove in a court of law that that is the case.

Physical security

Ensuring that corporate informational assets are physically secure is part of the CISO's job. This includes not only systems and networking equipment, but the transport and storage of backups, disposal of decommissioned computers, and so on.

In some organizations, the CISO is also responsible for the physical security of buildings housing technology and for the people within them. Regardless of whether this is the case, the CISO is always responsible to work with those responsible to ensure that information systems and data stores are protected with properly secured facilities sporting adequate security perimeters and with appropriate access controls to sensitive areas on a need-to-access basis.

Security architecture

The CISO and his or her team are responsible to design and oversee the building and maintenance of the company's security architecture. Sometimes, of course, CISOs inherit pieces of the infrastructure, so the extent to which they get to design and build may vary. The CISO

effectively decides what, where, how, and why various countermeasures are used, how to design network topology, DMZs, and segments, and so on.

Ensuring auditability of system administrators

It is the CISO's responsibility to ensure that all system administrators have their actions logged in such a fashion that their actions are auditable, and attributable to the parties who took them.

Cyber-insurance compliance

Most large companies have cybersecurity insurance. It is the CISO's job to make sure that the company meets all security requirements for coverage under the policies that are in effect, so that if something does go amiss and a claim is made, the firm will be covered.

Part 5

Handling a Security Incident (This Is a When, Not an If)

IN THIS PART ...

Recognize signs that you may have suffered a security breach.

Understand when you may be impacted from someone else's security breach.

Recover from hacked email, social media accounts, computers, and networks.

Recover from ransomware and other forms of malware.

Find out what to do if your computer or mobile device is stolen.

Chapter 11

Identifying a Security Breach

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding why it's critical to know if you were breached
 - » Identifying overt and covert breaches
 - » Recognizing various symptoms of covert breaches
-

Despite valiant efforts to protect your computer systems and data, you may suffer some sort of breach. In fact, the odds that your data will — at some point — be breached are close to 100 percent. The only real question is whether the breach will take place on your system or on someone else's.

Because you're ultimately responsible for maintaining your own computer systems, you need to be able to recognize the signs of a potential breach of your equipment. If a hacker does manage to penetrate your systems, you need to terminate his or her access as quickly as possible. If your data has been manipulated or destroyed, you need to restore an accurate copy. If systems are malfunctioning, you need to get them back on track.

In this chapter, you discover the symptoms of a breach. Armed with this knowledge, you can hopefully recognize if something is amiss and know the corrective actions to take.

If you've already receive notification from a third-party-provider where you store data that your data has been compromised or may have been compromised, refer to [Chapter 13](#).

Identifying Overt Breaches

The easiest breaches to identify are those in which the attacker announces to you that you've been breached and provides proof of that accomplishment.

Three of the most common overt breaches are those involving ransomware, defacement, and claimed destruction.

Ransomware

Ransomware is a form of malware that encrypts or steals data on a user's device and demands a ransom in order to restore the data to the user's control (see [Figure 11-1](#)). Typically, ransomware includes an expiration date with a warning to the tune of "pay within x hours or the data will be destroyed forever!" (See [Chapter 2](#) for more on ransomware.)

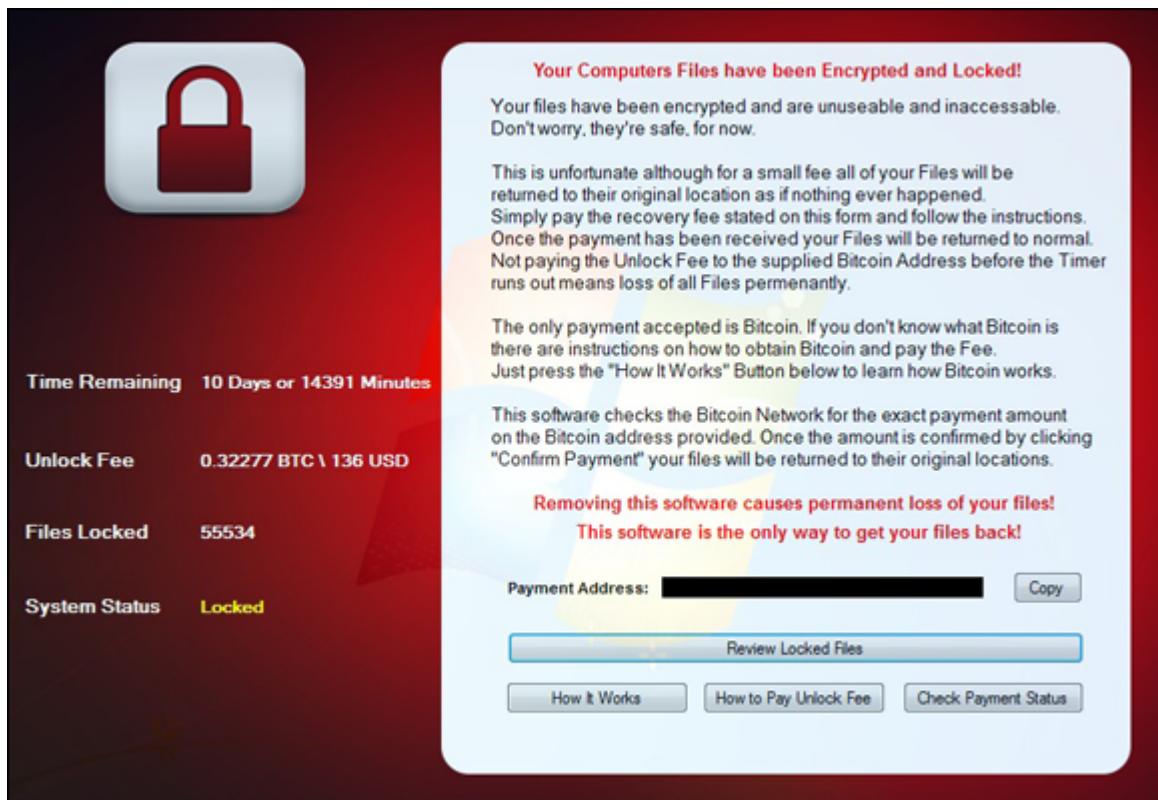


FIGURE 11-1: A ransomware screen from an overt infection.

Obviously, if your device presents you with such a demand and important files that should be accessible to you aren't available because they're missing or encrypted, you can be reasonably sure that you need to take corrective action.



WARNING One note: Some strains of bogus smartphone ransomware — yes, that is a real thing — display such messages but do not actually encrypt, destroy, or pilfer data. Before taking any corrective action, always check that ransomware is real.

Defacement

Defacement refers to breaches in which the attacker defaces the systems of the victim — for example, changing the target’s website to display a message that the hacker hacked it (in an almost “virtual subway graffiti”-like sense) or a message of support for some cause, as is often the case with hacktivists (see [Figure 11-2](#)).



FIGURE 11-2: A defaced website (ostensibly by the hacker group known as the Syrian Electronic Army).

If you have a personal website and it's defaced or if you boot up your computer and it displays a hacked by <some hacker> message, you can be reasonably certain that you were breached and that you need to take corrective action. Of course, the breach may have occurred at the site hosting your site, and not on your local computer — a matter that I discuss in [Chapter 12](#).

Claimed destruction

Hackers can destroy data or programs, but so can technical failures or human errors. The fact that data has been deleted, therefore, doesn't mean that a system was breached. However, if some party claims responsibility, the odds that the problems are the result of a breach can skyrocket.



TIP If someone contacts you, for example, and claims to have deleted a specific file or set of files that only a party with access to the system would know about, and those are the only files gone, you can be reasonably certain that the issue with which you are dealing is not a failure of hard disk sectors or solid-state disk chips.

Detecting Covert Breaches

While some breaches are obviously discernable to be breaches, most breaches are actually quite hard to detect. In fact, breaches are sometimes so hard to notice that various enterprises that spend millions of dollars a year on systems that try to identify breaches have had breaches go undetected for significant periods of time — sometimes for years!

The following sections describe some symptoms that may indicate that your computer, tablet, or smartphone has been breached.



REMEMBER Please keep in mind that none of the following clues exists in a vacuum, nor does the presence of any individual symptom, on its own, provide a guarantee that something is amiss. Multiple reasons other than the occurrence of a breach may cause devices to act abnormally and to exhibit one or more of the ailments described in the following sections.

However, if a device suddenly seems to suffer from multiple suspicious behaviors or if the relevant issues develop just after you clicked on a link in an email or text message, downloaded and ran some software provided by a source with potentially deficient security practices, opened some questionable attachment, or did something else about which wisdom you now question, you may want to take corrective action, as described [Chapter 12](#).



REMEMBER When considering the likelihood that a system was breached, keep in mind relevant circumstances. If problems start occurring after an operating system auto-update, for example, the likely risk level is much lower than if the same symptoms start showing up right after you click on a link in a suspicious email message offering you \$1,000,000 if you process a payment being sent from a Nigerian prince to someone in the United States. Maintain a proper perspective and do not panic. If something did go amiss, you can still take action to minimize the damage — see [Chapter 12](#).

Your device seems slower than before

Malware running on a computer, tablet, or smartphone often impacts the performance of the device in a noticeable fashion. Malware that transmits data can also sometimes slow down a device's connection to the Internet or even to internal networks.



REMEMBER Keep in mind, however, that updates to a device's operating system or to various software packages can also adversely impact the device's performance, so don't panic if you notice that performance seems to be somewhat degraded just after you updated your operating system or installed a software upgrade from a trusted source. Likewise, if you fill up the memory on your device or install many processor and bandwidth intensive apps, performance is likely to suffer even without the presence of malware.

You can see what is running on a Windows PC by pressing Ctrl + Shift + Esc and checking out the Task Manager window that pops up. On a Mac, use the Activity Monitor, which you can access by clicking the magnifying glass on the right side of the menu bar on the top of the screen and starting to type Activity Monitor. After you type the first few characters, the name of the tool should display, at which point you can press Enter to run it.

Your Task Manager doesn't run

If you try to run Task Manager on Windows (see [Figure 11-3](#)) or Activity Monitor on a Mac (see preceding section) and the tool does not run, your computer may be infected with malware. Various strains of malware are known to impact the ability of these programs to operate.

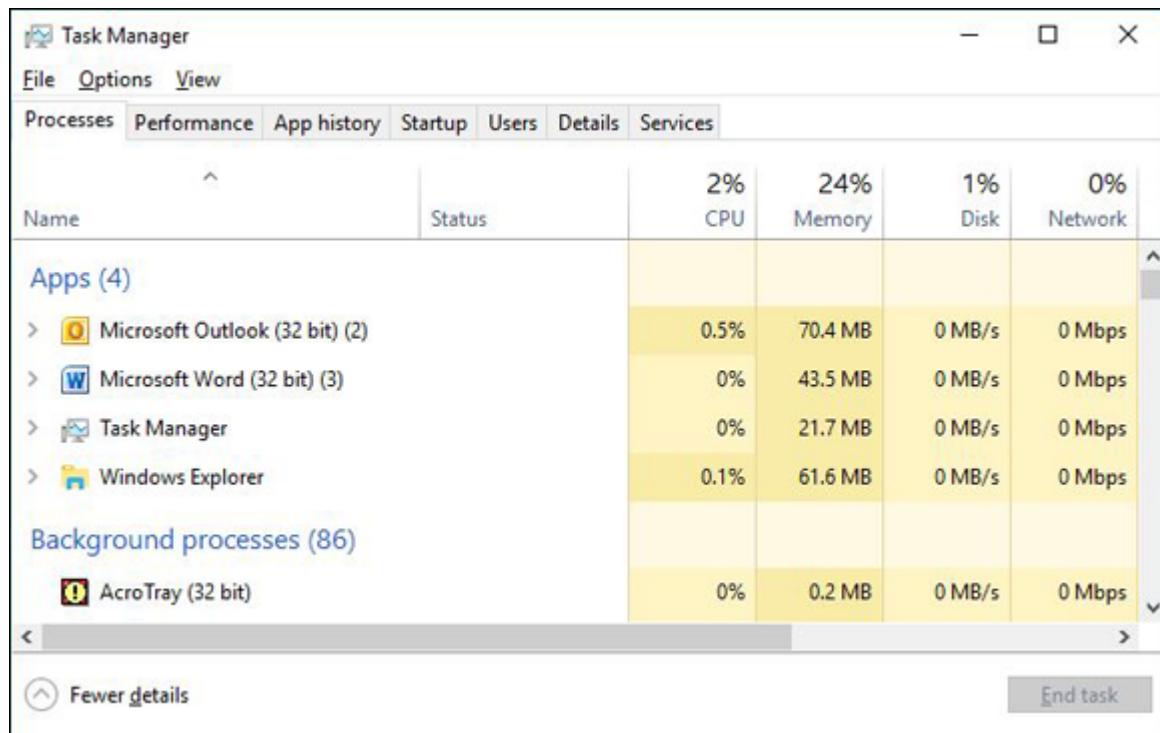


FIGURE 11-3: The Microsoft Windows Task Manager.

Your Registry Editor doesn't run

If you try to run Registry Editor, shown in [Figure 11-4](#), on Windows (for example, by typing **regedit** at the Run prompt) and it does not run, your computer may be infected with malware. Various strains of malware are known to impact the ability of the Registry Editor to execute.

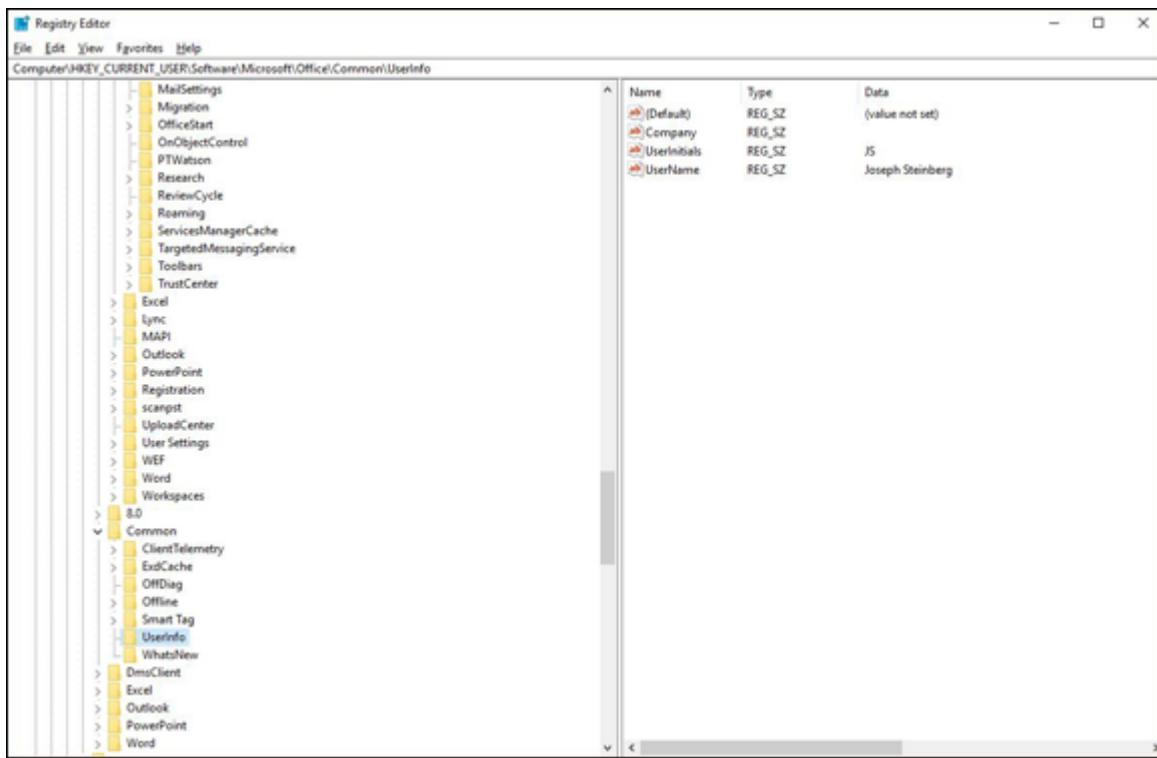


FIGURE 11-4: The Microsoft Windows Registry Editor.



WARNING Note that you may receive a warning when running Registry Editor that it requires Administrator permissions. That warning is normal and not the sign of a problem. It also should remind you of the potentially serious consequences of making registry edits: Don't make any if you're not sure what you are doing.

Your device starts suffering from latency issues

Latency refers to the time it takes for data to begin to travel after the instruction is issued to make it travel. If you're noticing delays that were not present before — especially if the delays seem significant — something may be amiss. Of course, your Internet provider or someone else may be experiencing problems, and everything may be fine on your local device. However, if the latency issues appear from only one device or a particular set of devices and not from all devices connected to the same network and if rebooting the impacted device/s does not ameliorate the situation, your device/s may have been compromised.



TIP If the device is using a wired network connection, be sure to test it with a new cable. If the problem goes away, the cause was likely a defective or damaged physical connection.

Your device starts suffering from communication and buffering issues

One highly visual symptom of communication-performance problems that can easily be discerned without much technical knowledge is if streaming videos seem to freeze while preloading future frames, or *buffering*, far more often than they did in the past (see [Figure 11-5](#)).

While buffering is an annoyance that happens to most folks from time to time, if it is happening regularly on a connection that previously did not suffer on a regular basis from such an ailment or it's happening from only one or more particular devices using the connection but not on others, it may be indicative of a compromised system.



FIGURE 11-5: An example of communication problems while streaming video. Note the viewable portion of the rotating circle in the middle of the video image.

If the device is using a wired network connection, be sure to check any physical cables that may be causing network issues.



REMEMBER Note that communication performance problems can also be a sign that someone is *piggy-backing* on your Internet connection, which is also a type of breach.

Your device's settings have changed

If you notice that some of your device's settings have changed — and you're certain that you did not make the change — that may be a sign of problems. Of course, some software makes setting changes, too (especially on classic computers, as opposed to smartphones), so changes may have a legitimate source as well. Most software, however, does not make major changes without notifying you. If you see dramatic settings changes, beware.

Your device is sending or receiving strange email messages

If your friends or colleagues report receiving emails from you that you did not send to them, something is likely amiss — this is especially true if the messages appear to be spam. Likewise, if you're receiving emails that appear to be from people who claim to have never sent the relevant messages, you may have suffered a breach.



REMEMBER Keep in mind, however, that many other reasons (including other kinds of attacks on systems other than your own devices and accounts) can lead to spam appearing to have emanated from you.

Your device is sending or receiving strange text messages

If your friends or colleagues report receiving text messages or other smartphone-type communications from you that you did not send to them, your smartphone may have been breached. Likewise, if you're receiving messages that appear to be from people who claim to have never sent the relevant messages, you may have suffered a breach.

New software (including apps) is installed on your device — and you didn't install it

If new programs or apps suddenly appear on your device and you did not install them, something may be amiss. While, in the case of some portable devices, the manufacturer or relevant service provider may occasionally install certain types of apps without your knowledge, if new apps suddenly appear, you should always look into the matter. Do a Google search on the apps and see what reliable tech sites say about them. If the apps are not showing up on other people's devices, you may have a serious issue on your hands.



REMEMBER Keep in mind, however, that sometimes the installation routines of one program install other applications as well. It is relatively common, for example, for various programs that are offered for free to users in a limited-feature version to also install other programs that are comarketed alongside them. Normally, such installation programs ask for permission to install the additional programs, but such transparency is not mandated by law, and some applications do not afford users such choices.

Also, remember that if you let someone else use your computer, he or she may have installed something (legitimate or illegitimate).

Your device's battery seems to drain more quickly than before

Malware running in the background uses battery power and can help drain the battery of laptops, smartphones, and tablets.

Your device seems to run hotter than before

Malware running the background uses CPU cycles and can cause a device to run physically hotter than before. You may hear internal cooling fans going on louder or more often than you usually do, or you may feel that the device is physically hotter to the touch.

File contents have been changed

If the contents of files have changed without you changing them and without you running any software that you expect would change them, something may be seriously amiss.

Of course, if you let someone else use your computers and gave him or her access to the files in question, before blaming malware or a hacker, be sure to check with the person you let use the computer whether he or she made any changes.

Files are missing

If files seem to have disappeared without you deleting them and without you running any software that you expect might delete them, something may be seriously amiss.

Of course, technical failures and human mistakes can also cause files to disappear — and, if you let someone else use your computer, he or she may be the culprit.

Websites appear somewhat different than before

If someone has installed malware that is *proxying* on your device — that is, sitting between your browser and the Internet and relaying the communications between them (while reading all the contents of the communications and, perhaps, inserting various instructions of its own) — it may affect how some sites display.

Your Internet settings show a proxy, and you never set one up

If someone has configured your device to use his/her server as a proxy, that party may be attempting to read data sent to and from your device and may try to modify the contents of your session or even seek to hijack it altogether.

Some legitimate programs do configure Internet proxies — but, such proxy information should show up when the software is installed and initially run, not suddenly after you click on a questionable link or download a program from a less-than-trustworthy source. (See [Figure 11-6](#).)

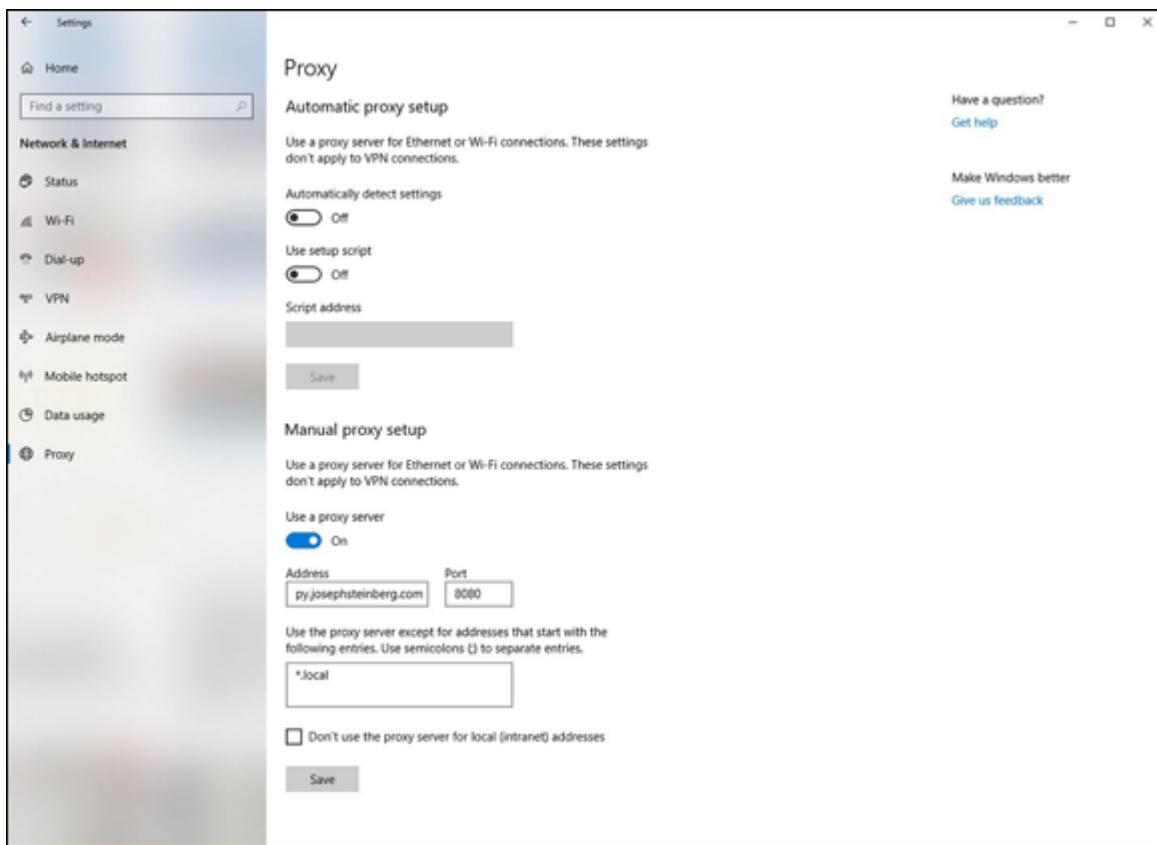


FIGURE 11-6: Internet connections configured to use a proxy. If you do not use a proxy and suddenly one appears listed in your Internet settings, something is likely amiss.

Some programs (or apps) stop working properly

If apps that you know used to work properly on your device suddenly stop functioning as expected, you may be experiencing a symptom of either proxying or malware interfering with the apps' functionality.



TIP Of course, if such a problem develops immediately after you perform an operating system update, the update is a far more likely source of the issue than is something more sinister.

Security programs have turned off

If the security software that you normally run on your device has suddenly been disabled, removed, or configured to ignore certain problems, it may be a sign that a hacker has penetrated your device and has turned off its defenses to prevent both his or her efforts from being blocked as well as to ensure that you do not receive warnings as he or she carries out various additional nefarious activities.

An increased use of data or text messaging (SMS)

If you monitor your smartphone's data or SMS usage and see greater usage figures than you expect, especially if that increase begins right after some suspicious event, it may be a sign that malware is transmitting data from your device to other parties. You can even check your data usage per app — if one of them looks like it is using way too much data for the functionality that it provides, something may be amiss.



WARNING If you installed the app from a third-party app store, you can try deleting the app and reinstalling it from a more trusted source. Keep in mind, however, that if malware is on your device, reinstalling the app may not always fix the problem, even if the app was the original source of the infection.

Increased network traffic

If you monitor your device's Wi-Fi or wired network usage and see greater levels of activity than you expect, especially if that increase begins right after some suspicious event, it may be a sign that malware is transmitting data from your device to other parties.



TIP On some systems, you can even check your data usage per app — if one or more apps look like they are using way too much data for the functionality that they provide, something may be amiss. If you installed the app in question from a less-than-reliable source, you can try deleting the app and reinstalling it from a more trusted source — but if malware is present on your device, reinstalling the app that it brought to the device may not always fix the problem, even if the app was, in fact, the original source of the infection.

You can check how much data your computer is using — and even how much each program is using — by installing a bandwidth monitor program on the device in question.

Unusual open ports

Computers and other Internet-connected devices communicate using virtual ports. Communications for different applications typically enter the device via different ports. Ports are numbered, and most port numbers should always be *closed* — that is, not configured to allow communications in.



TIP If ports that are not normally open on your computer are suddenly open and you did not just install software that could be using such ports, it is usually indicative of a problem. If you use Windows — especially if you understand a little about networking — you can use the built-in `netstat` command to determine which ports are open and what is connecting to your device.

Your device starts crashing

If your computer, tablet, or smartphone suddenly starts to crash on a much more frequent basis than in the past, malware may be running on it. Of course, if you just upgraded your operating system, that is the likely source for the problem.



WARNING If you are regularly seeing screens like the Blue Screen of Death (see [Figure 11-7](#)) — or other screens indicating that your computer suffered a fatal error and must be restarted, you have a problem. It may be technical, or it may be due to corruption from malware or a hacker.

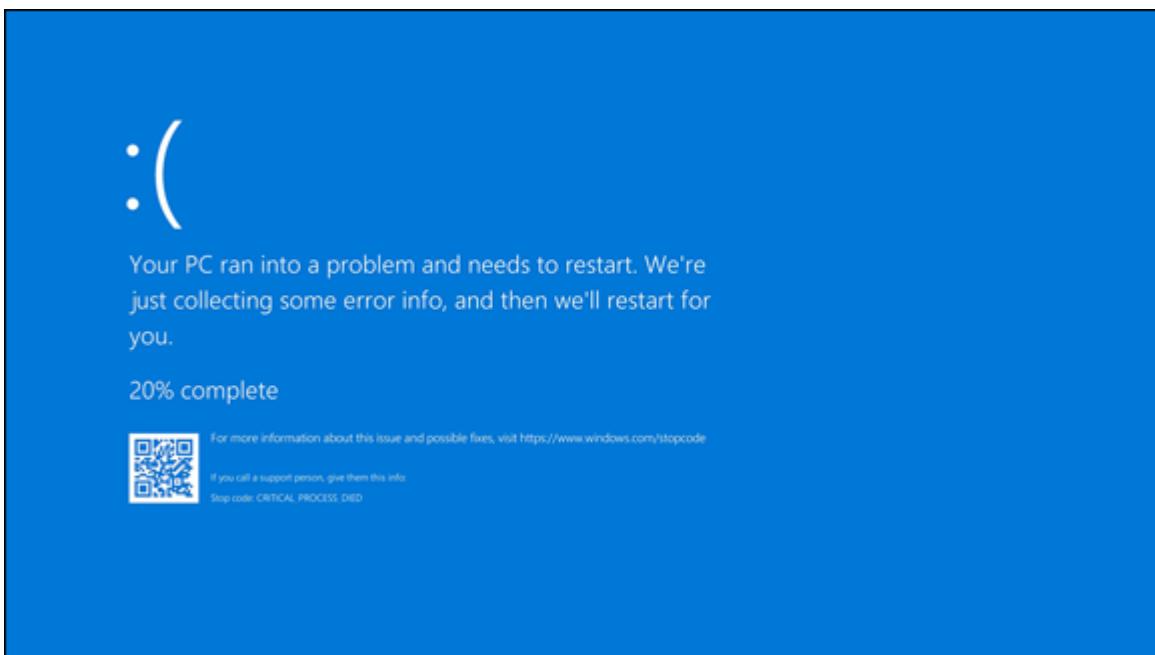


FIGURE 11-7: The modern version of the notorious Blue Screen of Death that appears after a severe crash of a computer running Microsoft Windows 10.

Your cellphone bill shows unexpected charges

Criminals are known to have exploited compromised smartphones in order to make expensive overseas phone calls on behalf of a remote party proxying through the device. Likewise, they can use a breached device to send SMS messages to international numbers and can ring up various other phone charges in other ways.

Unknown programs request access

Most security software for computers warns users when a program first attempts to access the Internet. If you receive such warnings and you don't recognize the program that is seeking access, or you recognize the

program but can't understand why it would need to access the Internet (for example, Windows Calculator or Notepad), something may be amiss.

External devices power on unexpectedly

If one or more of your external input devices (including devices such as cameras, scanners, and microphones) seem to power on at unexpected times (for example, when you're not using them), it may indicate that malware or a hacker is communicating with them or otherwise using them.

There are attacks that are known to have involved criminals remotely turning on people's cameras and spying on them.

Your device acts as if someone else were using it

Malicious actors sometimes take over computers and use them via remote access almost as if they were sitting in front of the device's keyboard. If you see your device acting as if someone else is in control — for example, you see the mouse pointer moving or keystrokes being entered while you're not using your mouse or keyboard — it may be a sign that someone else is actually controlling the machine.

New browser search engine default

As part of several attack techniques, hackers are known to change the default search engine used by people browsing the web. If your own browser's default search engine changed and you did not change it, something may be amiss. (To check if you're search engine change, see the list of default applications, as shown in [Figure 11-8](#).)

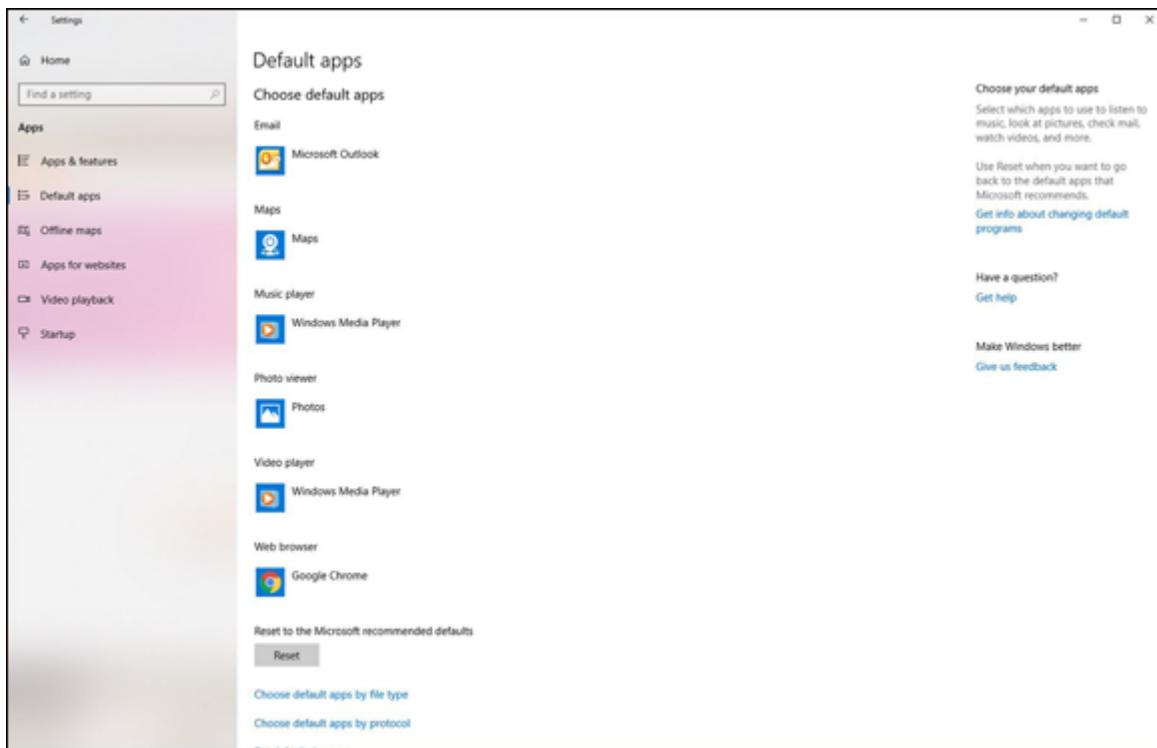


FIGURE 11-8: The Windows 10 Default apps configuration screen.

Your device password has changed

If the password to your phone, tablet, or computer changed without you changing it, something is wrong, and the cause is likely something serious.

Pop-ups start appearing



WARNING Various strains of malware produce pop-up windows asking the user to perform various actions (see [Figure 11-9](#)). If you're seeing pop-ups, beware. Such malware is common on laptops, but it exists for some smartphones as well.



FIGURE 11-9: This pop-up window from adware malware attempts to scare people into purchasing bogus security software.

Keep in mind that pop-ups that appear when you’re not using a web browser are a big red flag, as are pop-ups advising you to download and install “security software” or to visit websites of questionable repute.

New browser add-ons appear

You should be prompted before any browser add-on is installed (see [Figure 11-10](#)). If a new add-on is installed without your knowledge, it likely indicates a problem. Some malware is delivered in poisoned versions of various browser toolbars.

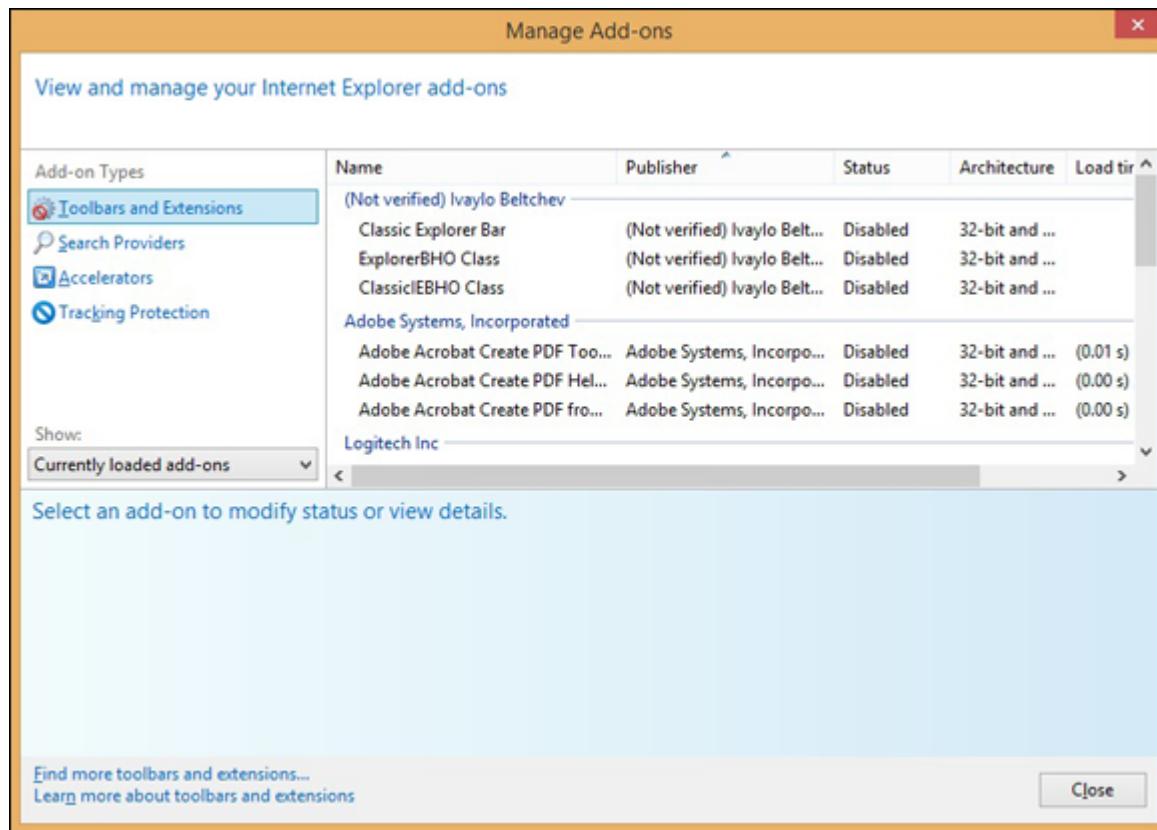


FIGURE 11-10: The Manage Add-ons window in Internet Explorer.

New browser home page

As part of several attack techniques, hackers are known to change the home page of users' browsers. If your own browser's home page changed and you did not change it, something may be amiss.

Your email from the device is getting blocked by spam filters

If email that you send from the device in question used to be able to reach intended recipients with no problem, but is suddenly getting blocked by spam filters, it may be a sign that someone or something altered your email configuration in order to relay your messages through some server that is allowing him or her to read, block, or even modify, your messages, and which other security systems are flagging as problematic.

Your device is attempting to access “bad” sites

If you use your computer, tablet, or smartphone on a network that blocks access to known problematic sites and networks (many businesses, organizations, and government entities have such technology on both their internal and bring-your-own-device [BYOD] networks) and you find out that your device was trying to access such sites without your knowledge, your device is likely compromised.

You're experiencing unusual service disruptions

If your smartphone seems to be suddenly dropping calls, or you find it unable to make calls at times when you appear to have good signal strength, or you hear strange noises during your phone conversations, something may be amiss.

Keep in mind that in most cases, these symptoms are those of technical issues unrelated to a breach. However, in some cases, a breach is the reason for such ailments. So, if you noticed the relevant symptoms shortly after you took some action that you now question or regret, you may want to consider whether you need to take corrective action (see [Chapter 12](#)).

Your device's language settings changed

People rarely change the language settings on their computers after performing the initial setup procedure, and few software packages do so either. So, if your computer is suddenly displaying menus and/or prompts in a foreign language or even has a language installed that you never installed, something is likely wrong.

You see unexplained activity on the device

If, on your device, you see emails in your Sent folder that you did not send, your device or email account was likely compromised.

Likewise, if files that you're certain that you never downloaded appear in your Downloads folder, someone else may have downloaded them to your device.

You see unexplained online activity

If your social media account has social media posts that you're certain that neither you nor any app that you have authorized made, something is clearly amiss. It may be that your account was breached, and your devices are all secure, or it may be that one of your devices with access to the account was breached and became the conduit for the unauthorized access to your account.

The same is true if you see videos that you never ordered appearing in your previous rentals of a video streaming service, purchases that you never made appearing in your order history at an online retailer, and so on.

Your device suddenly restarts

While restarts are an integral part of many operating system updates, they should not happen suddenly outside the context of such updates. If your device is regularly rebooting without your approval, something is wrong. The only question is whether the problem emanates from a security breach or from some other issue.

You see signs of data breaches and/or leaks

Of course, if you know that some of your data has leaked, you should try to determine the source of the problem — and the process of checking obviously includes examining for signs of problems on all your smartphones, tablets, and computers.

You are routed to the wrong website

If you're sure that you typed in a correct URL, but were still routed to the wrong website, something is amiss. The problem may reflect a security breach elsewhere, but it could indicate that someone has compromised your device as well.

If the misrouting happens from only one or more particular devices, but not from others on the same network, the odds are that the devices in question were compromised. In any case, never perform any sensitive task (such as logging into a website) from a device that is routing you incorrectly.

Your hard drive light never seems to turn off

If your hard drive light remains on constantly, or near constantly, malware may be doing something to the drive. Of course, hard drive lights come on for legitimate reasons when you are not actively using a computer — and, sometimes, a legitimate reason will entail the light being on for quite some time — so don't panic if it's the only sign that something is amiss.

Other abnormal things happen

It is impossible to list all the possible symptoms that malware can cause a device to exhibit. So, if you keep in mind that parties are seeking to hack into your systems, and that anomalous behavior by your device may be a sign of problems, you increase your odds of noticing when something seems off — and, of properly responding to a breach if one does, in fact, occur.

Chapter 12

Recovering from a Security Breach

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Surviving when your own computer has been hacked
 - » Recovering when someone has stolen your data from a third-party provider
-

You've discovered that you've suffered a data breach. Now what? Read this chapter, which covers how to respond in these types of situations.

An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth Many Tons of Response



REMEMBER When it comes to recovering from a security breach, there simply is no substitute for adequate preparation. No amount of post-breach expert actions will ever deliver the same level of protection as proper pre-breach prevention.

If you follow the various techniques described throughout this book about how to protect your electronic assets, you're likely to be in far better shape to recover from a breach than if you did not. Preparation not only helps you recover, but also helps ensure that you can detect a breach. Without proper preparation, you may not even be able to determine that a breach occurred, never mind contain the attack and stop it. (If you're unsure whether you've suffered a breach, see [Chapter 11](#).)

Stay Calm and Act Now with Wisdom

A normal human reaction to a cyber breach is to feel outraged, violated, and upset and/or to panic, but to properly respond to a breach, you need to think logically and clearly and act in an orderly fashion. Spend a moment to tell yourself that everything will be all right and that the type of attack with which you are dealing is one that most successful people and businesses will likely have to deal with at some point (or at many points).



WARNING Likewise, don't act irrationally. Do not attempt to fix your problem by doing a Google search for advice. Plenty of people online provide bad advice. Even worse, plenty of rogue websites with advice on removing malware and stopping attacks deposit malware on computers accessing them! Obviously, do not download security software or anything else from questionable sites.

Also, keep in mind that you need to act ASAP. Stop whatever else you're doing and focus on fixing the problem. Shut down any programs that you're using, save (and back up onto media that you will scan for malware before you reuse) any open documents and so on, and get to work on recovering from the breach.



REMEMBER When a breach occurs, time works against you. The sooner that you stop someone from stealing your files, corrupting your data, or attacking additional devices on your network, the better off you will be.

Bring in a Pro

Ideally, you should bring in a cybersecurity professional to help you recover. While this book gives you good guidance, when it comes to technical skills, there is simply no substitute for the years of experience that a good pro has.



TIP You should apply the same logic and seek professional help when faced with a serious computer and data crisis as you would if any of the following were true:

- » If you were seriously ill, you'd go to the doctor or hospital.
- » If you were arrested and charged with a crime, you'd hire a lawyer.
- » If the IRS sent you a letter that you're being audited, you'd hire an accountant.

Recovering from a Breach without a Pro's Help



TIP If you do not have the ability to bring in a pro, the following steps are those that you should follow. These steps are essentially the ones most professionals follow:

- 1. Figure out what happened (or is happening).**
- 2. Contain the attack.**
- 3. Terminate and eliminate the attack.**

Step 1: Figure out what happened or is happening

If possible, you want to figure out as much about the attack as possible so that you can respond accordingly. If an attacker is transferring files from your computer to another device, for example, you want to disconnect your device from the Internet ASAP.

That said, most home users do not have the technical skills to properly analyze and understand exactly what the nature of a particular attack may be — unless, of course, the attack is overt in nature (see [Chapter 11](#)).

WHEN AN ATTACK GOES UNDETECTED

The lack of expertise in this area by the average person should not be surprising. Most businesses that are breached, including many with their own information security professionals on staff, do not even discover that they have been successfully breached until months after the attackers began attacking! Some experts estimate that, on average, businesses do not discover non-overt information-security compromises until somewhere between six months and a year have elapsed since the initial breach occurred!

Gather as much information as you can about

- » What happened
- » What information systems and databases were hit
- » What could a criminal or other mischievous party do with the stolen material
- » What data and programs have been affected
- » Who, besides yourself, may face risks because of the breach (this includes any potential implications for your employer)



REMEMBER Do not spend a lot of time on this step — you need to take action, not just document — but the more information that you do have, the greater the chances that you will be able to prevent another similar attack in the future.

Step 2: Contain the attack

Cut off the attacker by isolating him or her from the compromised devices. Containing may entail:

- » **Terminating all network connectivity ASAP:** To terminate network connectivity for all devices on a network, turn off your router by unplugging it. (*Note:* If you're in a business setting, this step is usually not possible.)
- » **Unplugging any Ethernet cables:** Understand, however, that a network-borne attack may have already spread to other devices on the network. If so, disconnect the network from the Internet and disconnect each device from your network until it is scanned for security problems.
- » **Turning off Wi-Fi on the infected device:** Again, a network-borne attack may have already spread to other devices on the network. If so, disconnect the network from the Internet and disconnect each device from your network by turning off Wi-Fi at the router and any access points, not just on the infected computer.
- » **Turning off cellular data:** In other words, put your device into airplane mode.
- » **Turning off Bluetooth and NFC:** Bluetooth and NFC are both wireless communication technologies that work with devices that are in close physical proximity to one another. All such communications should be blocked if there is a possibility of infections spreading or hackers jumping from device to device.
- » **Unplugging USB drives and other removable drives from the system:** *Note:* The drives may contain malware, so do not attach

them to any other systems.

- » **Revoking any access rights that the attacker is exploiting:** If you have a shared device and the attacker is using an account other than yours to which he or she somehow gained authorized access, temporarily set that account to have no rights to do anything.

TERMINATING NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

While you can disconnect your Internet connection by physically unplugging from the router or network connection, you can also disable the connection on your device(s).

To terminate network connectivity on a Windows computer, follow these steps:

1. Choose Settings ⇒ Network Connections.
2. Right-click on the relevant connection (or connections one at a time) and then click on Disable.



TIP If, for some reason, you need Internet access from your device in order to get help cleaning it up, turn off all other devices on your network, to prevent any attacks from spreading over the network to your device. Keep in mind that such a scenario is far from ideal. You want to cut off the infected device from the rest of the world, not just sever the connections between it and your other devices.

Step 3: Terminate and eliminate the attack

Containing an attack (see preceding section) is not the same thing as terminating and eliminating an attack. Malware that was present on the infected device is still present after disconnecting the device from the Internet, for example, as are any vulnerabilities that a remote hacker or malware may have exploited in order to take control of your device. So, after containing the attack, it is important to clean up the system.

The following sections describe some steps to follow at this point:

Boot the computer from a security software boot disk

If you have a security software boot disk, boot from it. Most modern users will not have such a disk. If you do not, skip to the next section.

- 1. Remove all USB drives, DVDs, CDs, floppies (yes, some people still have them), and any other external drives from your computer.**
- 2. Insert the boot disk into the CD/DVD drive.**
- 3. Shut down your computer.**
- 4. Wait ten seconds and push the power button to start your computer.**
- 5. If you are using a Windows computer and it does not boot from the CD, turn the machine off, wait ten seconds, and restart it while pressing the BIOS-boot button (different computers use different buttons, but most use some F-key, such as F1 or F2) to go into the BIOS settings and set it to boot from the CD if a CD is present, before trying to boot from the hard drive.**
- 6. Exit the BIOS and Reboot.**

If you're using a Windows PC, boot the computer in Safe Mode. Safe Mode is a special mode of windows that allows only essential system services and programs to run when the system starts up. To do this, follow these steps:

- 1. Remove all USB drives, DVDs, CDs, floppies (yes, some people still have them), and any other external drives from your computer.**
- 2. Shut down your computer.**
- 3. Wait ten seconds and push the power button to start your computer.**
- 4. While your computer is starting, press the F8 key repeatedly to display the Boot Options menu.**
- 5. When the Boot Options menu appears, select the option to boot in Safe Mode.**

If you’re using a Mac, boot it with Safe Boot. MacOS does not provide the full equivalent of Safe Mode. Macs always boot with networking enabled. Its Safe Boot does boot cleaner than a normal boot. To Safe Boot, follow these steps:

- 1. Remove all USB drives, DVDs, CDs, floppies (yes, some people still have them), and any other external drives from your computer.**
- 2. Shut down your computer.**
- 3. Wait ten seconds and push the power button to start your computer.**
- 4. While your computer is starting, hold down the Shift key.**



TIP Older Macs (macOS versions 6–9) boot into a special superuser mode without extensions if a user presses the hold key during reboot. The advice to boot with Safe Boot applies only to Macs running more recent operating systems.

Backup

Hopefully you can ignore this section, because you paid attention to the advice in the chapter on backups, but if you have not backed up your data recently, do so now. Of course, backing up a compromised device is not necessarily going to save all your data (because some may already be corrupted or missing), but if you do not already have a backup, do so now — ideally by copying your files to an external USB drive that you will not attach to any other devices until it is properly scanned by security software.

Delete junk (optional)

At this point, you may want to delete any files that you do not need, including any temporary files that have somehow become permanent (a list of such files appears in the chapter on backups).

Why do the deletion now?

Well, you should be doing periodic maintenance, and, if you are cleaning up your computer now, now is a good time. The less there is for security software to scan and analyze, the faster it will run. Also, some malware hides in temporary files, so deleting such files can also directly remove some malware.

For users of Windows computers, one easy way to delete temporary files is to use the built-in Disk Cleanup utility:

- 1. In Windows 10, in the search box on the taskbar, type disk cleanup.**
- 2. Select Disk Cleanup from the list of results**
- 3. Select the drive you want to clean up and then click OK.**
- 4. Select the file types to get rid of and then click OK.**
- 5. Click on Accessories (or Windows Accessories).**
- 6. Click on Disk Cleanup.**

Run security software

Hopefully, you already have security software installed. If you do, run a full system scan. One important caveat: Security software running on a compromised device may itself be compromised or impotent against the relevant threat (after all, the security breach took place with the security software running), so, regardless of whether such a scan comes up clean, it may be wise to run the security software from a bootable CD or other read-only media, or, in cases of some products, from another computer on your home network.



TIP Not all brands of security software catch all variants of malware. Security professionals doing a device “clean up” often run security software from multiple vendors.

If you are using a Mac and your Safe Boot includes Internet access, run the security software update routines prior to running the full scan.

Malware, or attackers, may add new files to a system, remove files, and modify files. They may also open communication ports. Security software should be able to address all of these scenarios. Pay attention to the reports issued by the security software after it runs. Keep track of exactly what it removed or repairs. This information may be important, if, for example, some programs do not work after the cleanup. (You may need to reinstall programs from which files were removed or from which malware-modified files malware was removed.) Email databases may need to be restored if malware was found within messages and the security software was unable to fully clean the mess up.

Security software report information may also be useful to a cybersecurity or IT professional if you end up hiring one at a later date. Also, the information in the report may provide you with clues as to where the attack started and what enabled it to happen, thereby also helping to guide you on preventing it from recurring.



TIP Security Software often detects, and reports about, various non-attack material that may be undesirable due to their impact on privacy or potential to solicit a user with advertisements. You may, for example, see alerts that security software has detected tracking cookies or adware; neither is a serious problem, but you may want to remove adware if the ads bother you. In many cases you can pay to upgrade the software displaying the ads to a paid version that lacks ads. As far as recovering from an attack is concerned, these undesirable items are not a problem.



TIP Sometimes, security software will inform you that you need to run an add-on in order to fully clean a system. Symantec, for example, offers its Norton Power Eraser, that it says “Eliminates deeply embedded and difficult-to-detect crimeware that traditional virus scanning doesn’t always detect.” If your security software informs you that you need to run such a scanner, you should do so, but make sure that you obtain it from the legitimate, official, original source. Also, never download or run any scanner of such a sort if you are told to do so not as the result of running security software. Plenty of rogue pop-ups will advise you similarly, but install malware if you download the relevant “security software.”

Reinstall Damaged Software

There are experts who recommend uninstalling and reinstalling any software package that you know was affected by the attack, even if the security software fixed it.

Restart the system and run an updated security scan

For Windows computers, after you have cleaned the system, restart it in Safe Mode with networking using the procedure described above (but selecting Safe Mode with Networking rather than Safe Mode), run the security software, download all updates, and run the security software scan again.

If there are no updates, then you do not need to rerun the security software.

If you are using a Mac, Safe Boot already included networking so there is no reason to repeat the scan.

Install all relevant updates and patches. If any of your software has not been updated to its latest version and may contain vulnerabilities, fix this

during the cleanup.



TIP If you have the time to do so, run the security software full scan again after you have installed all the updates. There are several reasons for doing so, including the fact that you want it to check your system using its own most-up-to-date information on malware and other threats, as well as the fact that you want its heuristic analysis engine to have a baseline of what the system looks like with its latest updates.

Erase all potentially problematic System Restore points

System Restore is a useful tool, but it can also be dangerous. If a system creates a restore point when malware is running on a device, for example, restoring to that point will likely restore the malware! After cleaning up a system, therefore, be sure to erase all system restore points that may have been created when your system was compromised. If you are unsure if a restore point may be problematic, erase it. For most users, this means that it may be good to erase all system restore points.

To do this:

- 1. Click on the Start menu.**
- 2. Click on Control Panel.**
- 3. Click on All Control Panel Items.**
- 4. Click on Recovery.**
- 5. Click on Configure System Restore.**
- 6. Follow the prompts to delete the relevant system restore points.**

Restoring modified settings

Some attackers and malware may modify various settings on your device. What page you see when you start your web browser — for

example, your web browser home page — is one common item that malware commonly changes. It is important to change the browser page back to a safe page as the malware's starting page might lead to a page that reinstalls malware or performs some other nefarious task.

The following sections walk you through the process for each browser.



REMEMBER When using the phone or tablet versions of the browsers described in the following sections, the process will differ slightly, but should be simply discernable based on the instructions.

IN CHROME

To reset the Chrome browser:

- 1. Click on the three-dot menu icon at the top right corner.**
- 2. Click on Settings.**
- 3. Scroll down to the On Startup section and configure it accordingly.**

IN FIREFOX

To reset the Firefox browser:

- 1. Click on the three-line menu icon at the top right corner.**
- 2. Click on Options.**
- 3. Click on Home.**
- 4. Configure the values in the New Windows and Tabs section accordingly.**

IN SAFARI

To reset the Safari browser:

- 1. Click on the Safari menu.**
- 2. Click on Preferences.**

- 3. Click on the General tab.**
- 4. Scroll down to the Homepage field and configure it accordingly.**

IN EDGE

To reset the Edge browser:

- 1. Click on the three-dot menu icon at the top right corner.**
- 2. Click on Settings.**
- 3. Configure the Open Microsoft Edge with and Open new tabs with sections accordingly.**

Rebuild the system

Sometimes it is easier, instead of following the aforementioned processes, to simply rebuild the system from scratch. In fact, because of the risk of security software missing some problem, or of user mistakes when performing the security cleanup, many experts recommend that whenever possible one should rebuild a system entirely after a breach.

Even if you plan to rebuild a system in response to a breach, it is still wise to run a security software scan prior to doing so as there are some rare forms of malware that can persist even after a restore (such as BIOS reprogramming malware, certain boot sector viruses, and so on), and to scan all devices on the same network as the compromised device at the time of the compromise or afterwards, so as to ensure that nothing bad can propagate back to the newly restored device.

A guide to rebuilding systems from scratch appears in [Chapter 14](#).

Dealing with Stolen Information

If your computer, phone, or tablet was breached, it is possible that sensitive information on it was stolen and may be misused by a criminal.

You should change any of your passwords that were stored on the device, for example, and check all accounts that were accessible from the device without logging in (due to your earlier setting of the device to

“Remember Me” after a successful login) to ensure that nothing goes wrong. Obviously, if your passwords were stored in a strongly encrypted format the need to change them is less urgent than if they were stored in clear text or with weak encryption, but, ideally, unless you are certain that the encryption will hold up for the long term, you should change them anyway.

If you suspect that information may have been taken that could be used to impersonate you, it may be wise also to initiate a credit freeze and file a police report. Keep a copy of the police report with you. If you are pulled over by a police officer who informs you that there is a warrant out for your arrest in some location where you have never been, for example, you will have proof that you filed a report that private information that could be used to steal your identity was stolen from you. Such a document may not prevent you from having problems entirely, but it certainly may make your situation better in such a scenario than it would be if you had no such proof.

If you believe that your credit or debit card information was stolen, contact the relevant party at the phone number printed on the back of your card, tell them that the number may have been compromised, and ask them to issue you a new card with a new number. Also check the account for any suspicious transactions.

Keep a log of every call you make, when you made it, with whom you spoke, and what occurred on the call.

The more sensitive that information is, the more important it is to take action and to take it quickly.

Here are some ways to think of information:

» Not private, but can help criminals with identity theft:

- Names, address, and home telephone number.

This type of information is really available to anyone who wants it, even without hacking you. (Consider that a generation ago this type of information was literally published in phone books and sent to every home that had a phone line.)

That said, this type of information can be used in combination with other information to commit all sorts of crimes, especially if unsuspecting other people make mistakes (for example, by allowing someone with this information to open a library card without ever producing identification documents).

- Other public-record information: The price that you paid for your home, the names of your children, and so on. While this information is public record, a criminal correlating it with other information that may be lifted from your computer could create issues for you.

» **Sensitive:** Email addresses, cellphone numbers, credit card account numbers without the CVC code, debit cards account numbers that require a PIN to use or without a CVC code, ATM card numbers, student ID numbers, passport numbers, complete birthdays including the year, and so on. These items create security risks when compromised — for example, a stolen email address may lead to sophisticated phishing attacks that leverage other information garnered from your computer, attempts at hacking into the account, spam emails, and so on. Also, this type of stolen information may be used by a criminal as part of identity theft and financial fraud crimes, but may require combining multiple pieces of information in order to create a serious risk.

» **More sensitive:** Social Security numbers (or their foreign equivalents), passwords to online accounts, bank account numbers (when compromised by a potential criminal as opposed to when displayed on a check given to a trusted party), PINs, credit and debit card information with the CVC code, answers to challenge questions that you have used to secure accounts, and so on. These types of information can often be abused on their own.

Paying ransoms

If you have proper backups, you can remove ransomware the same way that you remove other malware. If any data gets lost in the process, you

can restore it from backups.

If you have been hit with over ransomware and do not have proper backups, however, you may face a difficult decision. Obviously, it is not in the common interest for you to pay a ransom to a criminal in order get your data back, but, in some cases, if your data is important to you, that may be the route that you need to go. In many cases, criminals will not even give you your data back if you do pay the ransom — so, by paying a ransom, you may not only waste money, but still suffer a permanent loss of your data. You will need to decide if you want to take that chance. (Hopefully, this paragraph will serve as a strong motivator for readers to back up proactively as discussed in the chapter on backups.)

Before paying a ransom, consult an information security expert. Some ransomware can be removed, and its effects undone, by various security tools. However, unless your security software tells you that it can undo the encryption done by ransomware, do not try to remove ransomware on your own once it has encrypted your data. Some advanced ransomware wipes the data permanently if it detects attempts to decrypt the data. Also, keep in mind that some advanced ransomware does not encrypt data, but rather removes it from the victim's device and only transmits it back if the ransom is paid. Such ransomware may be removable by security software, but security software cannot usually restore the data pilfered by the ransomware.



TIP The best defense for home users against the impact of ransomware is to back up and keep the backups disconnected from anything else!

Learning for the future

It is important to learn from breaches. If you can figure out what went wrong, and how a hacker managed to get into your systems (either directly or by using malware), you can institute de facto policies and procedures for yourself to prevent future such compromises. A cybersecurity professional may be able to help you vis-à-vis doing so.

Recovering When Your Data Is Compromised at a Third Party

Nearly all Internet users have received notification from a business or government entity (or both) that personal data was potentially compromised. How you address such a scenario depends on many factors, but the following sections tell you the essentials of what you need to know.

Reason the notice was sent

Multiple types of data breaches lead to organizations sending notifications. Not all of them represent the same level of risk to you, however. Notifications may be sent when a company has

- » Knowledge that an unencrypted database containing personal information was definitely stolen
- » Knowledge that an encrypted database containing personal information was definitely stolen
- » Detected unauthorized activity on a computing device housing your information
- » Detected unauthorized activity on a computing device, but not the one that houses your information (but on one connected to the same or logically connected network)
- » Detected the theft of credit or debit card numbers as can occur with a skimming device or the hacking of a point-of-sale credit card processing device
- » Discovered that there were, or may have been, improperly discarded computers, hard drives, or other storage media or paper-based information
- » Discovered that there was, or may have been, improperly distributed information, such as sensitive information sent to the wrong parties, unencrypted email sent to authorized parties, and so on

In all these cases, action may be warranted. But if a company notifies you that an unencrypted database of passwords including yours was stolen, the need to act is more urgent than if it detects unauthorized activity on a system on the same network as another machine containing only an encrypted version of your password.

Scams

Criminals see when a breach receives significant attention and often leverage the breach for their own nefarious purposes. One common technique is for crooks to send bogus emails impersonating the breached party. Those emails contain instructions for setting up credit monitoring or filing a claim for monetary compensation for the pain and inconvenience suffered due to the breach. Of course, the links in such messages point to phishing sites, sites that install malware, and other destinations to which you do not want to go.

Criminals also act quickly. In February 2015, for example, the Better Business Bureaus started reporting complaints of emails impersonating Anthem, Inc., less than one day after the health insurance company announced that it had suffered a breach.

Passwords

One of the types of breaches most commonly reported in the mass media involves the theft of password databases.

Modern password authentication systems are designed to provide some protection in case of a breach. Passwords are usually stored in a *hashed format*, meaning that they are stored with one-way encryption. When you enter your password during an attempt to log in, what you type is hashed and then compared with the relevant hash value stored in the password database. As such, your actual password is not stored anywhere and is not present in the password database. If a hacker steals a password database, therefore, the hacker does not immediately obtain your password.

At least that is how things are supposed to work.

In reality, however, not all authentication systems are implemented perfectly; hashed password databases have multiple exploitable weaknesses, some of which can help criminals decipher passwords even when they're hashed. For example, if a criminal looks at the database and sees that the hashed password for many people is the same, it is likely to be a common password (maybe even "password"), which often can be cracked quickly. There are defenses against such attacks, but many authentication systems do not use them.

As such, if you are notified by a company that it has been breached and that an encrypted version of your password was stolen, you should probably reset the password. You don't need to panic, though. In most cases, your password was likely protected by the hashing (unless you selected a common, weak password, which, of course, you should not have). If, for some reason, you have reused the compromised password on other sites that you don't want have unauthorized parties to log in as you, you should reset your password there as well and don't reuse the new password this time!

Payment card information

If your credit card information or debit card information may have been compromised, take the following measures:

- » **Leverage credit monitoring services.** Breached firms often give those people potentially affected by the relevant breaches a free year or two of credit monitoring. While one should never rely on such services to provide full protection against identity theft, using such services does have benefit. Being that the cost to you is only a few minutes of time to set up an account, you should probably do so.
- » **Monitor your credit reports.** If you see any new accounts that you did not open, immediately contact the party involved. Remember, when it comes to fraud, the earlier that you report a problem, the less aggravation you are likely to suffer from it.
- » **Set up text alerts.** If your card issuer offers the capability to set up text alerts, use the feature. That way, you'll be notified when charges are made and can act quickly if something appears to be amiss.

- » **Check your monthly statements.** Make sure that you continue to receive your account's statements as you did before and that they are not being misdirected to someone else.
- » **Switch to e-statements.** If possible, set up your account to receive electronic monthly statements rather than physical statements and make sure that you receive an email and/or text message when each and every statement is issued. Of course, be sure to properly protect the email account and smartphone to which such messages are sent.

Government-issued documents

If your passport, driver's license, or other government-issued identity document has been compromised, you should contact the agency that issued the relevant document and ask how you should proceed.

Document everything that you're told, including details as to who told you what.

You should also check online on the agency's website to see whether it offers instructions for such scenarios. In some cases, agencies will advise you to replace the document, which may necessitate a physical visit to an agency office. In other cases, the agency will advise you to do nothing, but will tag your account so that if the document is used for identification at other government agencies, those checking the ID will know to be extra vigilant (which, in itself, might be a reason to replace the document so that you do not encounter any extra aggravation when using it as ID).

School or employer-issued documents

If your school or employer ID information is compromised, immediately notify the issuer. Not only could this information be used to social engineer your school or employer, but it may potentially be used to obtain sensitive information about you from either one.

Social media accounts

If any of your social media accounts is compromised, immediately contact the relevant social media provider. All major platforms have mechanisms to address stolen accounts because all major platforms have

had to deal with stolen accounts numerous times. Keep in mind that you may be asked to provide government ID to prove your identity as part of the account recovery process.

Part 6

Backing Up and Recovery

IN THIS PART ...

Find out about the different types of backups and how to use them.

Discover how to prepare a device before restoring from a backup.

Figure out how to restore from a backup.

Chapter 13

Backing Up

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering the importance of backing up
 - » Exploring different types of backups
 - » Encountering different ways to back up
-

While backing up your data sounds like a simple concept — and it is — actually implementing an efficient and effective backup routine is a bit more complicated.

To properly back up, not only do you need to know about your backup options, but you need to think about many other details, such as the location of your backups, encryption, passwords, and boot disks. In this chapter, you find out about all those backup details and more.

Backing Up Is a Must

In the context of cybersecurity, *backing up* refers to creating an extra copy, or extra copies, of data (that may consist of data, programs, or other computer files) in case the original is damaged, lost, or destroyed.

Backing up is one of the most important defenses against the loss of data, and, eventually, it's likely to save you from serious aggravation, as nearly everyone, if not everyone, will, at some point, want to access data to which he or she no longer has access.

In fact, such scenarios occur on a regular basis. Sometimes, they're the result of human error, such as a person inadvertently deleting a file or misplacing a computer or storage device. Sometimes, they're the result of a technical failure, such as a hard drive dying or an electronic device

falling into water. And sometimes they're the result of a hostile action, such as a ransomware infection.

Sadly, many people believe that they back up all their data only to find out when something goes wrong that they do not have proper backups.

Don't let that happen to you. Be sure to back up on a regular basis — often enough that if you had to restore from a backup, you would not panic. In general, if you're in doubt as to whether or not you are backing up often enough, you aren't.



TIP Do not think of backups as being there for you if you ever lose data. Think of them being there for you *when* you lose data. At some point, essentially every person who uses electronic devices on a regular basis will lose data.

Looking at the Different Types of Backups

Backups can be categorized in many different ways. One important way of distinguishing various types of backups from one another is based on what is being backed up. The following sections look at the different types of backups based on that approach.

Full backups of systems

A *full system backup* is a backup of an entire system, including the operating system, programs/apps, settings, and data. The term applies whether the device being backed up is a smartphone or a massive server in a data center.

Technically speaking, a full system backup includes a backup of all drives attached to a system, not just those mounted inside of it — although if some drives are attached to the system only from time to time and are not needed for the primary use of the system, some might

exclude the contents of such drives from full system backups, especially if they’re attached to other systems, or are backed up as part of the backup of other systems. For most home users, however, a full system backup means exactly what it sounds like: Backing up everything.

A full system backup is sometimes known as a *system image* because it essentially contains an image of the system as it existed at a particular point in time. If a device that you have an image of fails, you should be able to use the system image to re-create the entire system as it was at the time that the backup was made. When you use the rebuilt system, it should function exactly as the previous system did at the time of the backup.



TIP Full system backups are the form of backup that typically is fastest to restore an entire system from, but they take longer to create than other forms of backup. They also usually require more storage space.

One important caveat: Because a system backup includes settings, hardware drivers, and so on, restoring from a system image does not always work well if you restore to a different device than the one that was originally backed up. If you imaged a laptop that runs Windows 7 as its operating system, for example, and then acquired a newer device intended to run Windows 10, which has different hardware in it, a restored system image of the first device may not work well on the newer device. The reverse is even more likely to be true: If you keep an old computer in your closet “just in case” and that just-in-case situation turns into reality, your attempts to restore the image from a newer machine to the older machine may fail fully or in part.



TIP System images are sometimes referred to as *ghosts* (with *ghost* also being the verb for creating such images), especially among

techies. The name originates from one of the original disk cloning software packages for PCs.

Original system images

One special case of system images is the original system image, also known as a *factory image*.

Many modern computing devices, whether laptops, tablets, or smartphones, come equipped with a factory image that can be restored. This means that when you acquire the device, it comes with an image of the original configuration that you receive — including the operating system, all the original software, and all the default settings — stored in a hidden partition or other storage mechanism not normally accessible to users.

At any point in time, you can perform a *factory reset* and set your device to look identical to the way that it did when it was new. When you do so, the device restores from the hidden image.



WARNING Two important caveats:

- » Some devices overwrite the factory reset image with new images in the event of certain operating system upgrades.
- » If you factory reset a computer, all security updates installed since the factory image was originally created will not be present on the restored device. Be sure to update your system ASAP after restoring and before going online for any other purpose!

Later system images

Some systems also create periodic images that you can restore from without having to go back to the original factory settings. Windows 10, for example, has such capabilities built in.



WARNING Never restore from an image unless you know that any problems that developed and caused you to need to restore did so after that image was made.

Original installation media

Original installation media is for programs that you acquire and install after you purchased your device.

If software came on a DVD or CD, saving the physical media that it came on allows you to reinstall the software in case of a problem.



WARNING Keep in mind, however, that if any updates for the software were issued and installed subsequent to the original installation, you will need to redownload and reinstall the updates. Doing so may happen automatically upon reinstallation, or it may require manual effort.

Downloaded software

If you've acquired programs since you purchased your device, it's likely that some or all of them were delivered to you via digital download.

When software is delivered as a download, the downloader does not receive a physical copy. However, if you received software via a download, you can store a copy of the installation file that you downloaded on one or more of many different types of media, such as a thumb drive or a CD or DVD. Alternatively, you can store the copy on a hard drive, but be sure to back up that drive if it is part of your computer infrastructure.

Additionally, some stores that sell downloadable software maintain copies of the software for you in a *virtual locker* so that you can download it at a later date. Such "backups" are useful, but be sure that you know how long the store will maintain the product in your locker. Some people have had serious problems because they relied on such

“backups” only to find out that the software was not available to them at the time that they needed it.



TIP For music and video files, the vendor’s retention period is often theoretically forever, or at least as long as the material is available to purchase by others. For software, as new versions are released and old versions are *sunsetted* (the technical term for a software vendor phasing out and, ultimately, terminating support for an obsolete version of its software), the retention period may be far shorter.

Full backups of data

An alternative to performing a full backup of the entire system is to perform a full backup of the data on the system, but not of software and the operating system. (Configuration settings for both the operating system and various installed programs are often stored in data folders and included in such backups.) Performing a full data backup allows a user to restore all of his or her data in one shot if something goes wrong. Depending on the tool used to perform the backup, the user may be able to restore a subset of the data as well — for example, by choosing to restore only one particular file that he or she accidentally deleted.



REMEMBER Restoring from a full data backup will not restore applications. If a system has to be rebuilt entirely, recovering from full backups of data likely requires prior restorations to factory settings (or a later image of the computer) and reinstallation of all software. That is certainly more tedious than simply restoring from a system image. At the same time, it is also far more portable. The recovery can usually be done without any problems on many devices that vary quite a bit from the original device. Reduce the likelihood of your restored system suffering a security breach by updating the reinstalled software with the latest patches immediately after the relevant installations.

Incremental backups

Incremental backups are backups made after a full backup and that contain copies of only the portion of data (or, in the case of a system backup, the portion of the entire system) that has changed since the preceding backup (full or incremental) was run.

Incremental backups normally run much faster than full backups because, on most systems, the vast majority of data files do not change on a regular basis. For the same reason, incremental backups also use less storage space than do full backups.

To recover data, however, restoration must be done from the last full backup plus all the incremental backups performed since that last full backup.



TIP If you decide to use incremental backups, consider limiting the number of such backups that you create after a full backup. For example, if you did only one full backup on the first day of the calendar month and performed incremental backups on all subsequent days until the next month began, then if something went

wrong on the last day of the month, you would potentially need to restore from as many as 30 backups in order to recover your files.

Many people (and many businesses as well) choose to do full system backups on one of the days of the weekend and then do incremental backups during each other day of the week, thereby finding a happy medium between the efficiency gains during the backup process and the potential for a tedious recovering process.

Differential backups

Differential backups contain all the files that changed since the last full backup. (They are similar to the first in a series incremental backups run after a full backup.) A series of differential backups therefore requires more time to run and uses more storage space than incremental backups, but less than the same number of full backups. Recovering from differential backups can be faster and simpler than doing so from incremental backups because a restore needs to be done from only the last full backup and last differential backup.

If you decide to use differential backups, consider how many backups you should be making before making the next full backup. If the differential backup starts to grow quite large, there will not be much performance gains while making the backup, and any restoration will take far longer than if done from just a full backup.

Many people (and many businesses as well) choose to do full system backups on one of the days of the weekend, and then do differential backups during each other day of the week.

Mixed backups

Incremental and differential backups are made in conjunction with full backups, as shown in [Table 13-1](#).

TABLE 13-1 A Comparison of Full, Incremental, and Differential Backups

<i>Full</i>	<i>Backup</i>	<i>Incremental Backup</i>	<i>Differential Backup</i>
Backup #1	All data	--	--
Backup #2	All data	Changes from Backup #1	Changes from Backup #1
Backup #3	All data	Changes from Backup #2	Changes from Backup #1



TIP Do not mix incremental and differential backups within the same backup scheme, as doing so can create complexity and lead to confusion and costly mistakes.

Continuous backups

Continuous backups refers to backups that run continuously. Every time that a change is made to data (or to a system and data), a backup of that change is made.



WARNING Continuous backups are great in case of a hard drive failure in the primary system — the backup is available and up-to-date — but do little in the case of a malware infection or data destruction, as the malware typically propagates to the backup as soon as it infects the primary system.

One exception are complex backup systems that log each backup action and have the ability to reverse them. These backups can undo problematic portions of backups to the point that they occurred.



TIP The process of continuously backing up is sometimes known as *syncing* (or *synchronizing*). You may see it described as such on your electronic devices or within various software packages.

Partial backups

Partial backups are backups of a portion of data. As opposed to full backups, partial backups do not back up all elements of data from a system. If a system were to be completely hosed, for example, you would have no way to fully recover all of its data contents from partial backups made earlier of that system.

Partial backups can be implemented in a full incremental-like model in which the first backup in a series includes all the elements that are part of the set included in the partial backup, and subsequent backups in the series include only items from that set that have changed.

Partial backups can also be implemented as always full-like — in which case, all elements of the set included in the partial backup are backed up each time, regardless of whether or not they have changed since the last backup.



REMEMBER Partial backups are not intended to be full backups in case of a malware attack or the like. They are useful, however, in other situations, such as one in which a particular set of files needs to be backed up separately due to the needs of a particular individual or group or due to the sensitivity of the material. For example, while the IT department may do full and incremental backups of all files on a shared network drive, the accountant who needs constant access to a particular set of spreadsheets stored on that drive — and would be unable to work if those files become inaccessible — may set up his own backup of just those files. He can use his backup if something goes wrong when he is on the road or working from home on the weekend, without the need to bother members of the technical support department at his firm to work unnecessarily on a Sunday.

Folder backups

Folder backups, are similar to partial backups in situations where the set of items being backed up is a particular folder. While backup tools can

facilitate folder backups, to the chagrin of many cybersecurity professionals and IT departments, many users perform such backups in an ad hoc fashion by manually making a copy of hard drive (or SSD) folders to USB drives at the end of each workday and consider such backups to be sufficient protection in case of problems.

Theoretically, of course, such backups work and can be used to recover from many problems. Reality dictates, however, that ad hoc backup procedures almost never result in proper backups: People forget on some days to back up or do not back up because they're hurried, neglect to back up some materials that they should have backed up, store the backups on insecure devices in insecure locations, or lose the devices on which the backups are stored — you get the idea!

If you want to be sure that you have proper backups when you need them — and, at some point, you are likely to need them — do not rely on ad hoc folder backups.



TIP Never back up a folder onto the same drive as the original folder resides. If the drive fails, you will lose both the primary source of data as well as the backup copy.

Drive backups

A *drive backup* is similar to a folder backup, but for situations where an entire drive is being backed up instead of only a folder. Ad hoc backups of drives do afford some protection, but rarely deliver sufficient protection against risks of losing data.



WARNING Never store the backup of a drive on the same drive as the one being backed up. If the drive fails, you will lose the primary source of data and the backup copy.

Virtual drive backups

One special case of drive backup is that in which a person or organization uses an encrypted virtual drive. For example, a user may store his or her files within a BitLocker drive on Windows. BitLocker is a utility built in to many versions of Windows that allows users to create a *virtual drive* that appears as any other drive to the user when it is in use, but appears as one giant encrypted file when not in use. To access the drive, the user must unlock it, normally by entering a password.

Backing up such drives is often accomplished by simply including the encrypted file within the full, incremental, folder, or drive backup. As such, all contents of the encrypted drive are copied without being referred to by name and remain inaccessible to anyone who does not know how to open the encrypted drive. Many backup tools offer drive backups in addition to more structured forms of backup.



TIP Some software packages refer to the creation of an image of an entire disk as *cloning*.

While such a scheme protects the contents of the encrypted drive as they live in backups by using the same encryption as was used for the primary copies, note several caveats:

- » **Even if one small change was made to a single file within the virtual drive, the entire encrypted file will be changed.** As such, a 1KB change could easily lead to an incremental backup having to back up an entire 1TB file.
- » **The backup is useless for recovery unless someone knows how to unlock the encrypted drive.** While encryption may be a good defense mechanism against unauthorized parties snooping on sensitive files in the backup, it also means that the backup is not, on its own, fully usable for recovery. It is not hard to imagine problems developing as a result — for example, if someone attempting to utilize a backup several years after it was originally made forgets the access code, or if the person who created a backup is unavailable at the time that someone needs to restore from it.

- » **As with all encrypted data, there is a risk that as computers become more powerful — and, especially, as quantum computing takes hold — today's encryption may not offer sufficient protection against brute force attacks.** While production systems will, no doubt, be upgraded with better encryption capabilities over time (as they already have been since the 56-bit encryption of the 1990s), backups that were made with old encryption technology and keys may become vulnerable to decryption by unauthorized parties. Hence, encryption may not forever protect your sensitive data contained in backups. You must store such backups in a secure location or destroy them when they are no longer needed.

Exclusions

Some files and folders do not need to be backed up unless you are imaging a disk (in which case the image must look exactly like the disk).

Operating system paging files and other temporary files that serve no purpose if a system is restored, for example, need not be backed up.

The following are examples of some such files and folders that you can exclude from backups on a Windows 10 machine. If you're using backup software, the software likely comes with a built-in list of default exclusions that may resemble this list:

- » **The Recycle Bin**, which effectively temporarily backs up deleted files in case a user changes his or her mind about deleting them
- » **Browser caches**, which are temporary Internet files from web browsers, such as Microsoft Edge or Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, Vivaldi, or Opera
- » **Temporary folders**, which are often called Temp or temp and reside in c:\, in the user directory, or in the data directory of software
- » **Temporary files**, which are usually named *.tmp or *.temp
- » **Operating system swap files**, such as pagefile.sys

- » **Operating system hibernation-mode system image information**, such as `hyperfil.sys`
- » **Backups** (unless you want to back up your backups), such as Windows File History
- » **Operating system files backed up during an operating system upgrade**, as usually found in `C:\Windows.old` on Windows computers that have had their operating systems upgraded
- » **Microsoft Outlook cache files (*.ost)**, but Outlook local data stores (*.pst) should be backed up (in fact, in many cases, they may be the most critical files in a backup)
- » **Performance log files** in directories called `PerfLogs`
- » **Junk files** that users create as personal temporary files to hold information, such as a text file in which the user types a phone number that someone dictated to him or her, but that the user has since entered into his or her smartphone directory

In-app backups

Some applications have built-in backup capabilities that protect you from losing your work if your computer crashes, power fails, or you don't have battery power left.

One such program is Microsoft Word, which offers users the ability to configure how often files should be saved for AutoRecover. For most people, this feature is quite valuable. The author of this book even benefited from this feature while writing this book!

While the mechanism of configuring AutoRecover varies between some versions of Word, in most modern versions, the process is the following or something similar: Choose File ⇒ Options ⇒ Save and configure the options according to your taste.



TIP In-app backups usually take just seconds to configure, normally run without your being actively involved, and can save you a lot of aggravation. In almost all cases, you should enable the feature if it exists.

Exploring Backup Tools

You can use multiple types of tools to create, manage, and restore from backups. Tools can automate various types of backups, for example, or can manage the process of a perpetual syncing backup. Backup tools come in wide variety of price ranges, depending on their robustness and scalability.

Backup software

Backup software is software designed specifically to run and manage backups and restorations from backups. You can find multiple vendors of such software, with exact features varying between products and between the platforms that they support (for example, features may vary between Windows and Mac versions of the same backup software package). Some offerings are intended for home users, some for large enterprises, and others for pretty much every level in between.

You can use backup software to manually or automatically backup — that is, you can configure it to backup specific systems, data, drives, or folders at specific times, using different backup models, such as full, incremental, and so on.



WARNING Backups can run only if a machine is on. So, be sure that your device to be backed up is on at those times! (Some backup software can be configured in cases of a missed backup to run the backup the next time that the device is booted or is idle.)



TIP Backup software can take some time to set up, but after you do so, it can often make the process of creating proper backups much easier than any other method of backing up.

Ideally, you should configure your systems to automatically back up at specific times to make sure that you actually back up and don't neglect doing so while you do any of the many things that come up in life.



WARNING Do not confuse these manual and automatic options with manual and automated task copying.

If you just worked on some important project or spent many hours creating some new work on your computer, however, you may want to kick off an extra manual backup to protect your work and the time that you invested in it.



TIP Beware of bogus backup software! Unscrupulous parties offer free backup software that contains malware of various severity, ranging from annoying adware to data-stealing infectors. Make sure that you obtain your backup software (as well as any other software that you use) from a reliable source.

Drive-specific backup software

Some external hard drives and solid state devices come with built-in backup software. Such software is often extremely intuitive and easy to use, and users may find it the most convenient way to set up their backup routines.



WARNING Three caveats, however:

- » Remember not to leave the drive connected to the system holding the primary data store.
- » If you use drive-specific versions of backup software, you may need to purchase all your backup drives from the same manufacturer in order not to complicate backup and restore procedures.
- » Drive-specific software is less likely to support newer technologies as they emerge from other vendors than is general backup software.

Windows Backup

Windows comes equipped with basic backup software built in. The software sports several features, and, for many people, may be sufficient. Using Windows Backup is certainly better than not backing up at all.

You can configure Windows Backup in two places:

- » In the Settings App, in the Update and Security Section.
- » Via the traditional Control Panel, which can be run from the Start Menu. Backup and Restore is an item in the traditional All Items view or in the System and Security section of the modern view.

Additionally, a Windows File Backup utility automatically backs up files as you modify them. You can access its configuration options via the Control Panel File History option. If you have plenty of disk space and work efficiently, make sure that your files are backed up quite often.

For more on restoring files from Windows File History, see [Chapter 15](#).

Smartphone/tablet backup

Many devices come equipped with the ability to automatically sync your data to the cloud — a process that allows you to restore the data to a new device if your device is lost or stolen. Even devices that do not have this feature built in almost always can run software that effectively delivers these features for a specific folder tree or drive.

Using the sync feature provides great protection, but it also means that your data is sitting *in the cloud* — which, simply means that it is on someone else's computer — and potentially accessible to both the cloud-

service provider (in the case of most smartphones, the provider would be Apple or Google), as well as to any government agencies that demand access to the relevant data while armed with a warrant, rogue insiders, or hackers who manage to somehow obtain access to it.



REMEMBER Even if you haven't committed any crimes, the government may still demand your data as part of data collection procedures related to crimes committed by other people. Even if you trust the government not to abuse your data, the government itself has had several breaches and data leaks, so you have good reason not to trust it to adequately protect your information from being stolen by other parties who may abuse it.

Before you decide whether or not to use the sync, think about the pros and cons.

Manual file or folder copying backups

Manual backups are exactly what they sound like: backups performed manually, often by people copying files, folders, or both from their primary hard drive (or solid-state drive) to a network folder or thumb drive.



WARNING Manual backups have their purpose, but using them on their own is not usually a good backup strategy. People inevitably do not perform such backups as frequently as they should, do not properly store such backups, and often do not back up all the items they should be storing copies of.

Automated task file or folder copying backups

Automated-task backups are essentially manual backups on steroids; they are manual backups that are run by a computer automatically instead of by people manually kicking them off. While automating the backup process reduces the risk of forgetting to back up or not backing

up due to someone being hurried, file and folder copying is still risky because if some sensitive information is, for some reason, not stored in the proper folder, it may not be backed up.

One possible exception is the case of virtual drives. If someone automates the process of copying of the file containing the entire drive on which he or she stores all of his or her data files, such backups may be sufficient. For most home users, however, setting up an automated copying routine is not a practical solution. Using backup software is a far simpler, and better, option.

Third-party backups of data hosted at third parties

If you store any data in the cloud or use a third-party service to host any of your systems or data, the party that owns the physical and/or virtual systems on which your data resides may or may not back it up — often without your knowledge or approval. If you store data on a Google Drive, for example, you have absolutely no control over how many copies Google makes of your data. Likewise, if you use a third-party service such as Facebook, any data that you upload to the social media giant's servers — regardless of the privacy settings that you set for the uploads (or possibly even if you deleted them) — may be backed up by Facebook to as many backups as the firm so desires, in as many different locations as the firm desires.

In some cases, third-party backups resemble drive backups. While the provider has your data backed up, only you — the party who “owns” the data — can actually read it in an unencrypted form from the backup. In other cases, however, the backed-up data is available to anyone who has access to the backup.

That said, most major third parties have robust redundant infrastructure and backup systems in place, meaning that the odds that data stored on their infrastructure will remain available to users is extremely high when compared with data in most people's homes.

Knowing Where to Back Up

For backups to have any value, they must be properly stored so they can be quickly and easily accessed when needed. Furthermore, improper storage of backups can severely undermine the security of information contained within the backups. You've probably heard stories of unencrypted backup tapes that contained sensitive information on them getting lost or stolen.

That said, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to proper storage of backups. You can back up in different places, which results in different storage locations.

Local storage

Storing a *local copy* of your backup — meaning somewhere near a home computer or readily accessible to the owner of a smartphone, tablet, or laptop — is a good idea. If you accidentally delete a file, you can quickly restore it from the backup.



REMEMBER That said, you should never keep all your backups local. If you store your backups in your house, for example, and your house were to be severely damaged in a natural disaster, you could simultaneously lose your primary data store (for example, your home computer) and your backups.

Backups should always be stored in a secure location — not on a bookshelf. A fireproof and waterproof safe bolted down to the floor or fastened to the wall are two good options.

Also, keep in mind that hard drives and other magnetic media are less likely to survive certain disasters than solid-state drives, thumb drives, and other devices containing memory chips.

Offsite storage

Because one of the purposes of backing up is to have the ability to preserve data (and systems) even if your primary copy is destroyed, you want to have at least one backup *offsite* — meaning in a different location than your primary data store.

Opinions differ as to how far away from the primary store the backup should be kept. Essentially, the general rule is to keep the backups far away enough that a natural disaster that severely impacts the primary site would not impact the secondary.



TIP Some people store a backup copy of their data in a fireproof and waterproof bag inside a safe deposit box. Bank safes typically survive natural disasters, so even if the bank is relatively close to the primary site, the backup is likely to survive even if it cannot be retrieved for several days.

Cloud

Backing up the cloud offers the benefits of offsite storage. If you lose all your equipment and systems to a natural disaster, for example, a copy of your data will almost always still exist in the cloud. Also, from a practical standpoint, the odds are that the information-security team at any major provider of cloud storage has much greater knowledge of how to keep data secure than do most individuals and have at their disposal tools that the average person cannot afford to purchase or license.

At the same time, cloud-based backup has its drawbacks.

When using cloud-based backup, you are relying on a third-party to protect your data. While that party may have more knowledge and better tools at its disposal, its primary concern is not you. If a breach occurs, for example, and large customers are impacted, its priorities may lie in addressing their concerns before addressing yours. Also, major sites are often major targets for hackers because they know that such sites contain a treasure trove of data, far greater than what they may be able to lift from your home PC. Of course, if the government serves the cloud provider a warrant, law enforcement agents may obtain copies of your

backups — even, in some cases, if the warrant was served because it has demonstrated probable cause only that someone else (and not you) committed a crime.

That said, for most people, cloud-based backup makes sense, with the pros outweighing the cons, especially if you encrypt your backups, thereby making their contents inaccessible to the cloud provider.



REMEMBER When it comes to computers, *cloud* really means “someone else’s computers.” Anytime you store sensitive data, including sensitive data within in backups, in the cloud, you’re really storing it on some physical computer belonging to someone else. The cloud provider may offer better security than you can offer yourself, but do not expect that your using the cloud will somehow magically eliminate cybersecurity risks.

Network storage

Backing up to a network drive offers a blend of features from several of the prior locations for storing backups.

Like a local backup, a network backup is normally readily available, but, perhaps, at a slightly lower speed.

Like an offsite backup, if the network server on which the backup is located is offsite, the backup is protected from site problems at the primary data’s site. Unlike offsite backup, however, unless you know for sure that the files are offsite, they may be in the same facility as the primary data.

Like cloud backup, network based backup can be restored to other devices on your network. Unlike cloud backup, it may be accessible to only devices on the same private network (which, may be a problem, or, in some situations, a good thing from a security standpoint).

Also, network storage is often implemented with redundant disks and with automatic backups, offering better protection of your data than many other storage options.



TIP If you use network storage for backups, make sure that whatever mechanism you are using to run the backup (for example, backup software) has the proper network permissions to write to the storage. In many cases, you may need to configure a login and password.

Mixing locations

There is no reason to only back up to one location. From the perspective of restoring data quickly, the more places that you have your data securely backed up, the better. In fact, different locations provider different types of protection optimized for different situations.

Keeping one copy local so that you can quickly restore a file that you accidentally delete, as well as maintaining a backup in the cloud in case of natural disaster, for example, makes sense for many people.

Keep in mind, however, that if you do store backups in multiple locations you need to make sure all the locations are secure. If you can't be sure about the security of some form of backup, beware and do not back up there just because "the more backups, the better."



TIP As different backup locations provide different strengths and weaknesses, utilizing multiple backup locations can protect you better against more risks than using just one site.

Knowing Where Not to Store Backups

Never, ever, store backups attached to your computer or network, unless you have another backup that you are willing to recover in case of a

malware attack. Ransomware that infects your computer and renders the files on it inaccessible to you may do the same to your attached backup.



WARNING After backing up, never leave backup hard drives or solid-state drives connected to the systems or networks that they are backing up. Any malware that infects the primary system can spread to the backups as well. Removing your backup from being connected to the material that it is backing up can make all the difference between quickly recovering from a ransomware attack and having to pay an expensive ransom to a criminal.

If you back up to write-once, read-many-times type media, which is most commonly found today in the form of CD-Rs and DVD-Rs, it is safe to leave the backup in an attached drive after you have finalized the backup recording and set the disk to read-only.

Encrypting Backups

Backups can easily become a weak point in the data protection security chain. People who are diligent about protecting their personal information, and organizations that are careful to do the same with their confidential and proprietary information, often fail to afford the same level of protection to the exact same data when it resides in backups rather than in its primary location.

How often do we hear news stories, for example, of sensitive data put at risk because it was present in an unencrypted form on backups tapes that were lost or stolen?



TIP In general, if you're not sure if you should encrypt your backup, you probably should.

Be sure to encrypt your backups if they contain any sensitive information, which, in most cases, they do. After all, if data is important enough to be backed up, the odds are pretty good that at least some of it is sensitive and should be encrypted.

Just be sure to properly protect the password needed to unlock the backups. Remember, it may be a while before you actually need to use the backups, so do not rely on your memory, unless you practice using that password on a regular basis to test the backups.



TIP From a practical standpoint, many professional system administrators who deal with multiple backups every day have never seen a backup that did not need to be encrypted.

Figuring Out How Often You Should Backup

No simple one-size-fits-all rule applies as to how often you should backup your system and data. In general, you want to ensure that you never lose enough work that it would cause you significant heartache.

Performing a full backup every day requires the most amount of storage space for backups and also takes the most time to run. However, doing so means that more total copies of data are available — so, if a backup were to go bad at the same time as the primary data store, less data is likely to be lost — and fewer backups are required to perform a system or data restoration.

Performing a full backup everyday may be feasible for many individuals, especially those who can run the backups after work hours or while they are asleep at night. Such a strategy offers the best protection. With storage prices plummeting in recent years, the cost of doing so, which was once prohibitive for most individuals, is now affordable to most folks.

Some people and organizations choose to perform a weekly full backup and couple that backup with daily incremental or differential backups. The former strategy provides the fastest backup routine; the latter offers the faster recovery routine and reduces the number of backups needed in order to perform a restore to a maximum of two instead of seven.



TIP Additionally, consider using manual backups or an automated in-app backup scheme if you are working on important materials during the day. Using the in-app automated backups in Word, for example, can protect you from losing hours of work if your computer crashes. Likewise, copying documents to a second location can prevent losing significant work if your hard drive or SSD fails.

For apps that do not have in-app-auto-backup capabilities, some folks have suggested periodically using the Windows or Mac Send menu option to send to themselves via email copies of files that they are working on. While doing so is clearly not a formal backup strategy, it does provide a way of backing up work during the day between regular backups and often does so offsite, ensuring that if one's computer were to die suddenly, an entire day's worth of work would not be lost.



TIP In general, if you are not sure if you are backing up often enough, you probably aren't.

Disposing of Backups

People and organizations often store backups for long periods of time — sometimes preserving materials for so long that the encryption used to protect the sensitive data on backup media is no longer sufficient to adequately protect the information from prying eyes.

As such, it is imperative that, from time to time, you either destroy your backups or re-create them.



REMEMBER Both hardware and software formats change over time. If you backed up to tapes in the 1980s, to Bernoulli Boxes in the early 1990s, or to Zip drives in the late 1990s, you may have difficulty restoring from the backups today because you may have problems obtaining the necessary hardware, compatible drivers, and other software needed to read the backups on a modern computer.

Likewise, if you backed up data along with various DOS programs or early Windows 16-bit executables needed to process the contents of those backups, you may be unable to restore from the backups to many modern machines that may be unable to run the executables. Obviously, if you did a full system image of a machine 20 years ago, you are going to have difficulty restoring from the image today (you may be able to do so using virtual machines — something well beyond the technical skill level of most users).

Even some older versions of data files may not work easily. Word documents from the mid-1990s, for example, which can be infected with various forms of malware, do not open in modern versions of Word unless a user enables such access, which may be difficult or impossible to do in certain corporate environments. File formats utilized specifically by software that has long since disappeared entirely from the market may be even harder to open.

As such, old backups may not have much value to you anyway. So, once a backup is no longer valuable or once its data protection may be at risk of compromise, get rid of it.

How should you dispose of the backup tapes, disks, and so on? Can you just throw them in the trash?

No. Do not. Doing so can totally undermine the security of the data in the backups.

Instead, utilize one of the following methods:

- » **Overwriting:** Various software programs will write over every sector of the storage media several times (the actual number of times depends on the security level that the user specifies), making subsequent recovery of data from the decommissioned media difficult, if not impossible.
- » **Degaussing:** Various devices containing strong magnets can be used to physically render data on magnetic media (such as hard drives and floppy disks) inaccessible by exposing the media to a strong magnetic field.
- » **Incineration:** Burning storage media in a high-temperature fire is often enough to destroy it. Do not attempt this on your own. If you want to pursue such a method, find a professional with experience. The incineration process varies based on the type of media involved.
- » **Shredding:** Cutting the media into tiny pieces. Ideally, such media should be totally pulverized into dust. In any case, shredding using an old-fashioned shredder that cuts media into strips is generally not considered secure disposal of media that has not been previously overwritten or degaussed.



TIP I can't overstate the importance of properly storing and disposing of backups. Serious data leaks have resulted from backup media that was lost after being stored for quite some time.

Testing Backups

Many folks have thought that they had proper backups only to discover at the time that they needed to restore that the backups were corrupted. Hence, testing backups is critical.

While, theoretically, you should test every backup that you make and test that every single item within the backup can be restored, such a

scheme is impractical for most people. Do, however, test the first backup that you make with any software, check the auto-recover files the first time that you use Word, and so on.

Some backup software comes with the capability to *verify* backups — that is, after making a backup, it checks that the original data and data in the backups match. Running such verification after making a backup adds significant time to the backup process, but is well worth running if you can do so because it helps ensure that nothing was improperly recorded or otherwise became corrupted during the backup process.

Conducting Cryptocurrency Backups

Because cryptocurrency (see [Chapter 1](#)) is tracked on a ledger and not stored in a bank, backing up cryptocurrency involves backing up the private keys used to control the addresses in the ledger at which one has cryptocurrency, not backing up the cryptocurrency itself. Often, keys are not maintained electronically. They’re printed on paper and stored in a bank vault or fireproof safe.

For those who use hardware wallets to store the keys to their cryptocurrency, the backup for the wallet device is often a *recovery seed*, which is a list of words that allows the device to re-create the keys needed for the relevant addresses. It is generally accepted that the list of words should be written down on paper and stored in a bank vault and/or safe — not stored electronically.

Backing Up Passwords



TIP Anytime that you back up lists of passwords, make sure to do so in a secure manner. For important passwords that do not change often and are not likely to be needed on an urgent basis, consider making no digital records of them at all. Instead, write them down on a piece of paper and put that paper in a bank safe deposit box.

Creating a Boot Disk

If you ever need to re-create your system, you will need the ability to boot the computer, so as part of the backup process, you should create a boot table disk. For most smartphones and tablets, creating a boot disk is not an issue because resetting the device to factory settings will make it bootable.

Such simplicity is not, however, always the case with computers, so when you perform your first backup you should ideally make a bootable disk that you know is safe to boot from (in other words, no malware and so on). Most backup software packages will walk you through this process, and some computer manufacturers will do the same on your initial startup of the system. Various security software packages are distributed on bootable CDs or DVDs as well.

Chapter 14

Resetting Your Device

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering two major types of device resets
 - » Figuring out when you should use each type to reset your device
 - » Resetting your device accordingly
-

[Chapter 13](#) talks about backing up and why it is a critical component of any and every cybersecurity plan. The odds are close to 100 percent that, at some point, you will lose access to some file to which you still need access, and restoring from a backup will be a “lifesaver.”

In this chapter, I discuss resetting your computer and tell you what you need to know to successfully reset your device so that it’s (almost) as good as new.

Exploring Two Types of Resets

Sometimes, the easiest way to restore — and to help ensure that none of the problems that forced you to restore in the first place remain — is to start over by resetting your device to factory settings and reinstalling your apps and copying your data files from a backup.



TIP Some forms of malware can survive a factory reset. So, if your device was infected with malware, be sure to address that problem even if you plan to reset your device. Or consult with an expert.

Additionally, there will likely be times when your device crashes — that is, it becomes unresponsive and stops functioning normally. Such occasions can be scary for many nontechnical users, who assume that

they may lose their data. Performing the proper type of reset in such occasions, however, is quite simple and will almost always preserve the user's files (although files currently being worked on may be preserved as they were last saved).

Resets come in two major flavors— soft and hard. It is critical to know the difference between them before you use either type.

Soft resets

A *soft reset* is the equivalent of physically turning a device off and then turning it back on. It does not wipe programs, data, or malware.



TIP One common use of soft resets is to restart a device if it crashes and becomes unresponsive. It can also be useful after a Blue Screen of Death-type of crash (see [Figure 14-1](#)).

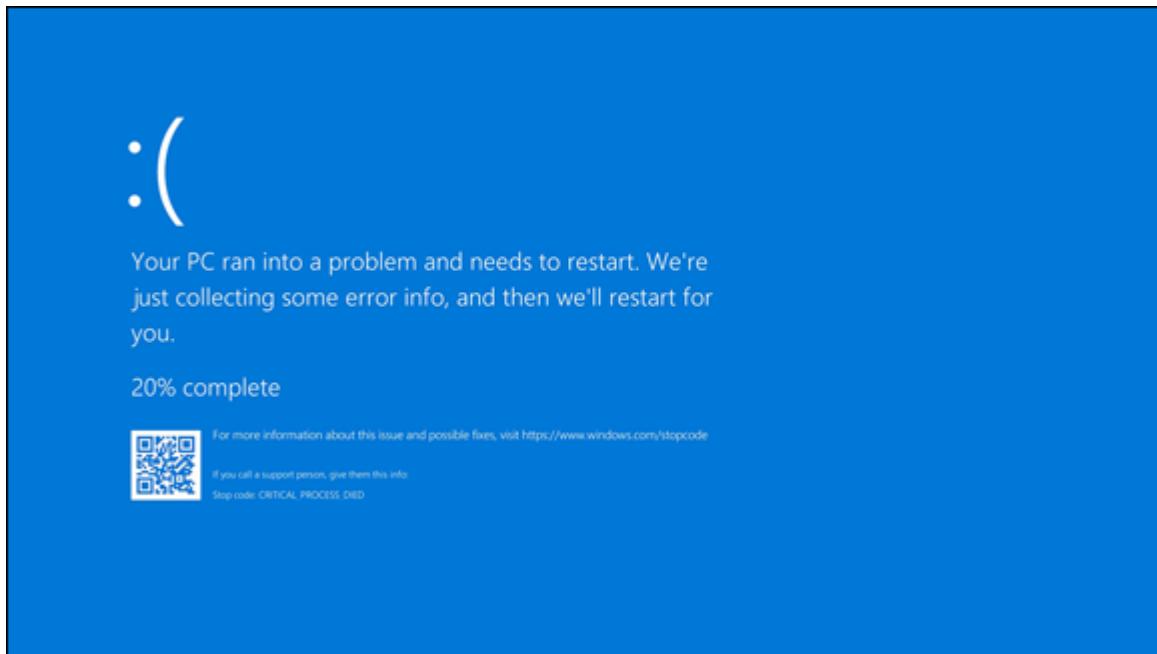


FIGURE 14-1: One variant of the infamous Windows Blue Screen of Death. If you see this screen, you need to soft reset your computer.

Older devices

Most modern computing devices have a soft reset capability, but some older devices do not. In such devices, however, the battery is often removable, so removing the battery and cutting off all power to the device achieves the same desired effect.

Windows computers

Most Windows computers can be soft reset by holding down the Power button for ten seconds to do a shutdown. Holding down the button cuts off power to the computer from both the battery and any connected AC adapters/mains (even if the battery is connected and fully charged) and shuts it down.

After the device shuts down, wait ten seconds and press the Power button once to restart the computer.

Mac computers

Various models of Mac computers can be soft reset through different means:

- » Hold down the Power button for about five seconds, and the Mac should shut down completely. Let go of the Power button, wait a few seconds, and press it once again, and the Mac should reboot. On some Macs pressing and holding the Power button may display a menu, in which case you should press R for Reboot and reboot directly, rather than shutting down and restarting the device.
- » Press and hold the Control + ⌘ key together with the Power button.
- » Press and hold the TouchID button until the Mac reboots.

Android devices

The way to soft reset an Android device varies between manufacturers. One of the following methods is likely to work:

- » Press and hold the Power button until you see a shutdown/restart menu and then press Restart. (Or press Power Off, wait a few seconds, and then press the Power button again to turn the phone back on.)

- » Press and hold the Power button. If no menu appears, keep holding the Power button for 2 minutes. At some point the phone should turn off — when it does, wait 10 seconds and turn it back on.
- » If you have a removable battery, remove it, wait ten seconds, put it back in, and turn on the phone.

iPhones

The way to soft reset an iPhone varies based on the model. In general, one of the following methods will work:

- » Press and release the Volume Up button, then press and release the Volume Down button, and then press and hold the Side button (the Power button) until the Apple logo appears on the screen. Wait for the device to reboot.
- » Press and hold the Power button. While still holding it, press and hold the Volume Down button. When a Slide To Power Off prompt and slider appears on the screen, slide the slider to the right and turn the device off. Wait ten seconds and press the Power button to turn it back on.
- » Press and hold the Power button, and, while still doing so, press and hold the Volume Down button. Continue to hold both buttons as the iPhone powers off and back on. Release both buttons when the Apple logo appears on the screen and wait for the device to reboot.



WARNING If you are using some versions of the iPhone X, following this option for performing a soft reset could end up calling emergency services (911 in the United States) because holding these particular buttons for longer than five seconds may be preprogrammed to issue an SOS signal from the device.

Hard resets

Hard resets reset a device to its factory image or to something similar. (For more on factory image, see [Chapter 13](#).)

If you want to recover to the original factory image — to effectively reset your device to the way it was when it was new — you need to follow the instructions for your particular device.



WARNING Hard resets are almost always irreversible. Once you run a hard reset and a device is set back to its factory settings, you typically cannot undo the reset. Anything that you previously installed on the device and any data that you stored on it is likely gone forever. (Advanced tools may, in some cases, be able to recover some of the material, but such recoveries are often incomplete, and, in many cases, impossible altogether.) As such, do not run a hard reset until you are sure that you have backups of all the material that you need on the device that you are hard resetting.

Also keep in mind the following:

- » In some cases, a factory reset will not reset your device to the way it was when it was new because during operating system updates, the recovery image was updated as well. Factory resetting such a device will set the device to the way the device would have looked (or quite similar to the way it would have looked) when it was new had you purchased it with the new operating system.
- » After performing a factory reset, one or more (or possibly all) patches and other security updates that you have installed on the device may be gone — meaning that your device is more likely than not vulnerable to various compromises. So, immediately after restoring you should run the operating system update process (repetitively — until it finds no needed updates) as well as the update process for any security software (also repetitively until it finds no needed updates). Only after those steps have been completed should you begin to install other software or perform any other online activities.

Resetting a modern Windows device

Your modern Windows device likely offers one or more ways to reset it. The following sections describe three major ways.

METHOD 1

- 1. In the Start menu, click on Settings or PC Settings, depending on your operating system version.**
- 2. In Windows Settings, click on Update and Security.**
The Windows Update screen appears.
- 3. Click on Recovery in the menu on the left side of the Window.**
- 4. Click on the Get Started button in the Reset this PC section at the top of the window.**

At this point, you may be prompted to install the original installation CD on which you received Windows 10. If you receive that message, do so. If you do not receive it — and most users don't — just continue.

Windows then offers you two choices. Both remove programs and apps and reset settings to their defaults:

- **Keep my files:** Selecting this option leaves your data files intact (as long as they are stored in data folders).
- **Remove everything:** Selecting this option removes all your data files along with the apps and programs (this is the factory reset option).

- 5. Select either reset option.**



TIP If you're performing a full reset because your system was infected by malware or your data files may otherwise have been corrupted, ideally select Remove everything and restore your data files from a clean backup.

If you select to remove your files along with everything else, Windows presents you with two choices:

- **Just remove my files:** Selecting this option erases your files, but does not perform any drive cleaning. This means that someone who gains access to the drive may be able to recover the data that was in the files — in full or in part — even after the files are deleted by the rest. This option runs relatively quickly.
- **Remove files and clean the drive:** Selecting this option not only removes all your data files, it wipes the drive — that is, writes over every 1 or 0 in your file — to dramatically reduce the likelihood that anyone in the future could recover any data from the deleted files. Cleaning a drive is time-consuming; if you select this option the restore can take much longer than if you select the first option.



TIP

If you are resetting the system so that you can use a clean system after recovering from a malware infection, there is no reason to clean the drive. If you are wiping it before giving it to someone else, fully cleaning the drive is a good idea. (In fact, some would argue that you should wipe the entire drive with even better wiping technology than is provided through the reset option discussed in this chapter.)

At this point, you may receive a warning message. If your computer originally had a different operating system and was upgraded to Window 10, resetting the system will remove the recovery files created during the upgrade that allow you to downgrade back to the previously running operating system — meaning that if you reset the system you will have a Windows 10 computer that cannot be easily downgraded to another operating system. In most cases, this warning is not a significant issue — Windows 10 is relatively mature, and few people who upgrade to Windows 10 as of the date of this book's publishing choose to downgrade.

Of course, if you are resetting the system because it is not working properly after you performed an upgrade to Windows 10, do not

proceed with the reset. Downgrade it to the older version of Windows using the relevant tool.

You then will see a final warning message that tells you that the computer is ready to reset — and which communicates what that means. Read what it says. If you do not want any of the things that it says will happen to happen, do not proceed.

6. When you are ready to proceed, click on the Reset button.

You can probably go out for coffee. A reset takes quite some time, especially if you chose to clean your drive.

7. After a while, if you receive a prompt asking you whether you want to continue to Windows 10 or to perform troubleshooting, click on Continue.

METHOD 2

If you're *locked out* of your computer, meaning that it boots to a login screen, but you cannot log in — for example, if a hacker changed your password — you can still factory reset the machine:

1. Boot your PC.

2. When the login screen appears, click on the Power icon in the bottom right-hand corner.

You are prompted with several choices. Do not click on them yet.

3. Without clicking any choices, first hold down the Shift key and then click on Restart.

A special menu appears.

4. Click on Troubleshoot.

5. Select Reset This PC.

6. Select Remove Everything.



WARNING Read the warnings, and understand what the consequences of running a hard reset are before you run it. This reset is likely irreversible.

METHOD 3

This method may vary a bit between various computer manufacturers.

To reset your device:

- 1. Turn on your computer and boot into Windows 10.**

If you have more than one operating system installed on your computer, select the Windows 10 installation that you want to reset. If all you have is one operating system — as is the case for most people — you won't have to select it because it will boot automatically.

- 2. While the computer is booting, press and hold down the F8 key to enter the boot menu.**
- 3. In the boot menu on the Advanced Boot Options screen that appears, click on Repair Your Computer and press Enter.**
- 4. If you're prompted to choose a keyboard layout, do so and then click on Next.**
- 5. Select your username, type your password, and click on OK.**
- 6. From the System Recovery Options menu that appears, click on the System Image Recovery link and follow the onscreen prompts to do a factory reset.**



TIP If your menus appear differently after pressing F8 in the last step, look through them for a Factory Reset option.

Resetting a modern Android device

Modern Android devices come equipped with a Factory Reset feature, although the exact location of the activation option for it varies based on the device's manufacturer and operating system version.

I show you several examples of how to activate a hard reset on several popular devices. Other devices are likely to have similar options.

SAMSUNG GALAXY SERIES RUNNING ANDROID 9

On popular Samsung Galaxy phones running Android version 9 (or Android Pie, the latest version of Android as of early 2019), you can access the factory reset option by following these instructions:

- 1. Run the Settings app.**
- 2. From the main Settings menu, click on General Management.**
- 3. Click on Reset.**
- 4. Click on Factory Data Reset.**
- 5. Follow the instructions presented with the relevant warning.**

SAMSUNG TABLETS RUNNING ANDROID 9

The popular Samsung series of tablets have menu structures for hard-resetting that are similar to those used for the Galaxy series, although with a different look and feel.

- 1. Run the Settings app.**
- 2. From the main Settings menu, click on General Management.**
- 3. In the General Management menu, click on Reset.**
- 4. Click on Factory Data Reset.**
- 5. Follow the instructions at the warning to continue.**

HUAWEI DEVICES RUNNING ANDROID 8

Huawei phones, which are popular throughout Asia, can be reset using the following steps (or similar steps, in case of operating system version differences):

- 1. Run the Settings app.**

- 2. From the main settings menu, click on System.**
- 3. In the System menu, click on Reset.**
- 4. In the Reset menu, click on Factory Data Reset.**
- 5. Follow the instructions at the warning to continue.**

Resetting a Mac

Before you hard reset a Mac, you should perform the following steps:

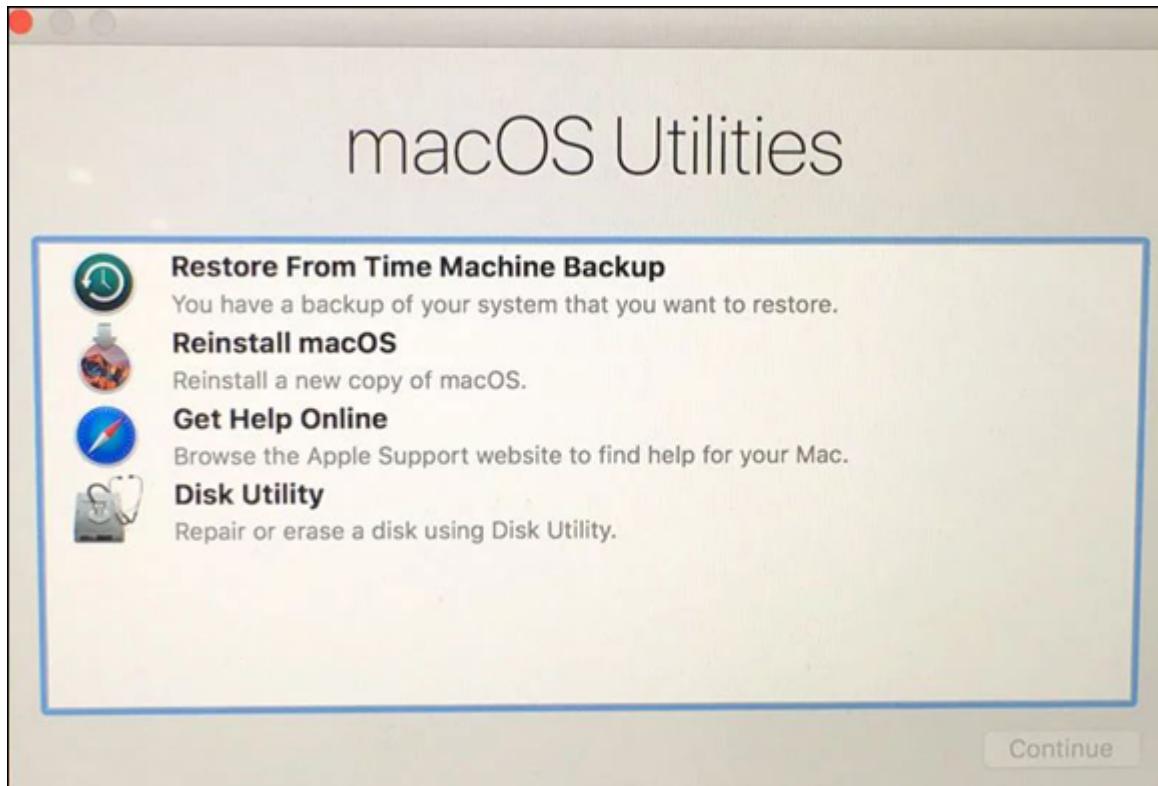
- 1. Sign out of iTunes.**
- 2. De-authorize any apps that are locked to your Mac.**
Sign out of them so that you can relog-in from the newly restored device, which those systems may see as if it were a different device.
- 3. Sign out of Messages.**
- 4. Sign out of iCloud.**
You can do this in the System Preferences app. You will need to put in your password.

While a hard reset will work without the preceding three steps, performing the steps can prevent various problems when you restore.

After you're signed out of iTunes, Messages, and iCloud:

- 1. Restart your Mac in Recovery Mode by restarting your Mac and holding down the Command and R keys while it reboots.**
You may be presented with a screen asking you in what language you want to continue. If you are, select your preferred language — for the sake of this book, I assume that you have selected English.
- 2. Run the Disk Utility.**
- 3. In the Disk Utility screen, select your device's main volume and click on Unmount then Erase.**
- 4. Erase any other disks in the device.**
- 5. Exit the Disk Utility by clicking Quit Disk Utility in the Disk Utility menu.**

6. Click on Reinstall macOS and follow the steps to reinstall the operating system onto the primary disk within your Mac (see [Figure 14-2](#)).



[FIGURE 14-2:](#) The Mac Recovery Mode menu.

Resetting an iPhone

To hard reset a modern iPhone:

1. Run the Settings app and choose General ⇒ Reset ⇒ Erase All Content and Settings.
2. If you're asked for your Apple ID and Password to confirm the erasure, enter them.
3. When you see a warning and a red Erase iPhone (or iPad) button, click on it.

Rebuild Your Device after a Hard Reset

After you hard reset a device, you should

- » Install all security updates
- » Install all the programs and apps that you use on the device — and any relevant updates
- » Restore your data from a backup

See [Chapter 15](#) for more detail on these topics.

Chapter 15

Restoring from Backups

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Restoring from different types of backups
 - » Figuring out archives
 - » Recovering cryptocurrency
-

Backing up is a critical component of any and every cybersecurity plan. After you reset a device to its factory settings as part of the recovery process (see [Chapter 14](#)), you can restore your data and programs so that your device will function as normal.

Because most people do not have to restore from backups regularly and because restoration is typically done after something “bad” happened that forced the restoration to be necessary, many folks first experience the process of restoring from backups when they are quite stressed. As such, people are prone to making mistakes during restoration, which can lead to data being lost forever. Fortunately, this chapter shows you how to restore.

You Will Need to Restore

The odds are close to 100 percent that, at some point, you will lose access to some file to which you still need access, and restoring from a backup will be a lifesaver. But restoring is not necessarily simple. You need to contemplate various factors before performing a restoration. Proper planning and execution can make the difference between recovering from lost data and losing even more data.



TIP Restoring from backups is not as simple as many people think. Take the time to read this chapter before you perform a restore.

Wait! Do Not Restore Yet!

You noticed that some data that you want to access is missing. You noticed that a file is corrupted. You noticed that some program is not running properly. So, you should restore from a backup, right? Wait!



WARNING Restoring without knowing why the problem occurred in the first place may be dangerous. For example, if you have a malware infection on your computer, restoring while the malware is still present won't remove the threat, and, depending on the type of malware and backup, may lead to the files in your backup becoming corrupted as well. If the malware corrupts the primary data store, you may lose your data and have nowhere from which to restore it!

For example, people who tried to restore data from backups on external hard drives have lost data to ransomware. The moment the external drive was connected to the infected computer, the ransomware spread to the backup and encrypted it as well!



WARNING Malware can spread to cloud-based storage as well. Merely having the backup in the cloud is not a reason to restore before knowing what happened.

Even in the case of backups that are on read-only media, which malware cannot infect, attempting to restore before neutralizing the threat posed

by the infection can waste time and potentially give the malware access to more data to steal.

Before you restore from any backups, make sure to diagnose the source of the problem that is causing you the need to restore. If you accidentally deleted a file, for example, and know that the problem occurred due to your own human error, by all means go ahead and restore. But if you're unsure what happened, apply the techniques described in [Chapters 11](#) and [12](#) to figure out what you need to do to make your computer safe and secure prior to restoring from the backup.

Restoring from Full Backups of Systems

A *full system backup* is a backup of an entire system, including the operating system, programs/apps, settings, and data. The term applies whether the device being backed up is a smartphone or a massive server in a data center.

As such, the restoration process recreates a system that is effectively identical to the one that was backed up at the time that it was backed up. (This is not totally true in the absolute sense — the system clock will show a different time than the original system, for example — but it is true for the purposes of learning about system restoration.)

Restoring to the computing device that was originally backed up

System restoration from a system image works best when systems are restored to the same computing device from which the original backup was made. If your system was infected with malware, for example, and you restore to the same device from an image created before the malware infection took place, the system should work well. (Of course, you would lose any work and other updates done since that time, so hopefully you backed them up using one of the methods in [Chapter 13](#).)



WARNING Full system restores are often irreversible. Be absolutely sure that you want to run one before you do.

Restoring from a full system backup is likely the fastest way to restore an entire system, but the process can take dramatically longer than restoring just a few files that were corrupted. It is also far more likely to lead to accidentally erasing settings or data created since the last backup. As such, use a full system restore only when one is truly needed.



TIP If you accidentally delete a bunch of files or even folders, do not perform a full system restore. Just restore those files from a backup using one of the techniques described later in this chapter.

Restoring to a different device than the one that was originally backed up



REMEMBER System restoration from an image often won't work on a system with totally different hardware components than the system that was originally imaged. In general, the more different a system is from the system that was imaged, the more problems that you may encounter.

Some of those problems may autocorrect. If you restore a system with drivers for one video card to a system with another video card, for example, the restored system should realize that the wrong drivers are installed and simply not use them. Instead, it defaults to the operating system's built-in drivers and allows you to install the drivers for the correct card (or, in some cases, automatically download them or prompt you to do so).

Some problems may not autocorrect. For example, if the computer that was backed up used a standard USB-connected keyboard and mouse and the device to which you are restoring uses some proprietary keyboard that connects differently, it may not work at all after the restore; you may need to attach a USB keyboard to the system to download and install the drivers for your proprietary keyboard. Such situations are becoming increasingly rare due to both standardization and improvements in modern operating systems, but they do exist.

Some problems may not be correctable. If you try to restore the system image of a Mac to a computer designed to run Windows, for example, it won't work.



TIP Some backup software packages allow you to configure a restore to either install separate drivers or search for drivers that match the hardware to which the restoration is being done to replace those found in the backup that are unsuitable. If you have such a feature and have difficulty restoring without it, you may want to try it.

A full system backup may or may not include a backup of all content on all drives attached to a system, not just those mounted inside of it.

(Theoretically, all such drives should be included in a system image, but the term *system image* is often used to mean an image of the internal hard drives and SSDs.)



TIP If a device for which you have an image fails, you should be able to use the system image to re-create the entire system as it was at the time that the backup was made. When you use the rebuilt system, it should function exactly as the previous system did at the time of the backup.

Original system images

If you want to recover to the original factory image of a system prior to restoring your data and programs, see [Chapter 14](#), which is dedicated to performing such restorations.

After performing such a factory reset, one or more (or possibly all) patches and other security updates that you have installed on the device may be gone. Your device is likely vulnerable to various compromises. Immediately after restoring, you should, therefore, run the operating system update process (repetitively until it finds no needed updates) as well as the update process for any security software (also repetitively until it finds no needed updates).

Only after those steps are completed should you install other software, restore your data, or perform any other online activities.

Later system images

Before you restore from any system image, you must ascertain that whatever problem occurred that necessitated the restoration will not remain, or be restored, during the restoration. If your computer was infected with ransomware, for example, and you remove the malware with security software, but need to restore the criminally encrypted files from a backup, you do not want to end up restoring the ransomware along with the data.

If you know for certain that an image was made prior to the arrival of the problem, go ahead and use it. If in doubt, if possible, restore to an extra device and scan it with security software prior to performing the actual restoration. If you do not have an extra device to which you can restore and are unsure as to whether the backup is infected, you may want to hire a professional to take a look.

Installing security software

After you restore from a system image (whether factory settings or a later image), the first thing that you should do is check whether security software is installed. If it is not, install it. Either way, make sure to run the auto-updates until the software no longer needs updates.



TIP Install security software before attempting to do anything online or read email. If you do not have security software in place before you perform such tasks, performing them could lead to a security breach of your device.

If you have the security software on CD or DVD, install it from there. If you created a USB drive or other disk with the security software on it, you can install it from there. If not, copy the security software to the hard drive from wherever you have it and run it.

Original installation media

For programs that you acquire and install after you purchased your device, you can reinstall them after you restore the original system image or even a later image that was created before the software was installed.



TIP If you reinstall software from a CD or DVD, any updates to the software that were released after the CD or DVD was created will not be installed. Be sure to either configure your program to auto-update or manually download and install such updates. In some cases, software installation routines may also ask you whether you want them to automatically perform a check for updates immediately upon the completion of the installation. In general, answering affirmatively is a wise idea.

Downloaded software

The way that you reinstall programs that you previously purchased and installed at some point after you purchased your device depends on where the software is located:

- » **If you have a copy of the software on a thumb drive,** you can reinstall from the drive by connecting it into your device, copying

the files to your hard drive, and running the install.



TIP

If there is any possibility that the thumb drive is infected with malware — for example, you’re restoring due to a malware infection and may have inserted the thumb drive into your infected computer at some point in the past — make sure to scan it with security software before you run or copy anything from it. Do so from a device with security software running that will prevent infections from spreading upon connection from the drive to the machine being used for scanning.

- » **If you copied the software to a DVD or CD,** you can install from that disc. Make sure to install all necessary updates.
- » **If the purchased software can be redownloaded from a virtual locker,** do so. In some cases, software that is redownloaded will have been automatically upgraded to the latest release. In other cases, it will be the same version as you originally purchased, so make sure to install updates.
- » **If the software is downloadable from its original source** (public domain software, trialware that you activate with a code, and so on), feel free to redownload it. In some cases — for example, if newer versions require paying an upgrade fee —you may need to download the version that you had previously. In any case, make sure to install all updates for the version that you do install.

Restoring from full backups of data

In many cases, it makes sense to restore all the data on a device:

- » **After a restore from a factory image:** After restoring from a factory image and reinstalling all necessary software, your device will still have none (or almost none) of your data on it, so you need to restore all your data.

- » **After certain malware attacks:** Some malware modifies and/or corrupts files. To ensure that all your files are as they should be, after an infection, restore all your data from a backup. Of course, this assumes that you have a recent enough backup from which to do so without losing any work.
- » **After a hard drive failure:** If a hard drive fails, in full or in part, you will want to move your files to another drive. If you have a separate drive for data than for the operating system and programs — as many people do — performing a full restore of data is the easiest way to restore.
- » **When transitioning to a new, similar device:** Restoring from a backup is an easy way to ensure that you put all your data files onto the new device. Because some programs store settings in user data folders, copying the files directly or performing a selective restoration from a backup is usually a better way to go. But as people sometimes inadvertently leave out files when using such a technique, full restorations are sometimes used.
- » **After accidental deletions:** People occasionally accidentally delete large portions of their data files. One easy way to restore everything and not worry about whether everything is “back to the way that it should be” is to do a full restore of all data.

Unlike restoring from a full system backup, restoring from a full data backup won’t restore applications. If a system has to be rebuilt entirely, recovering from full backups of data likely requires prior restorations to factory settings (or a later image of the computer) and reinstallation of all software.



TIP The multi-step process of restoring from a factory image and then reinstalling applications and restoring data may seem more tedious than simply restoring from a more recent system image, but it also usually proves to be far more portable. Recovery can usually be done on devices that vary quite a bit from the original device, using images of those devices (or onto a new device), followed by the reinstallation of programs and the restoration of data.

Restoring from Incremental Backups

Incremental backups are backups made after a full backup and contain copies of only the portion of the contents being backed up that have changed since the preceding backup (full or incremental) was run.



TIP Some simplistic backup software products use incremental and differential backups internally, but hide the internal workings from users. All users do is select which files or file types to restore and, if appropriate, which versions of those files, and the system works like magic hiding the merging of data from multiple backups into the resulting restoration.

Incremental backups of data

In many cases of home users, *incremental backup* refers to incremental backups of data. To recover data that was backed up using an incremental backup scheme requires multiple steps:

1. **A restoration must be done from the last full data backup.**
2. **After that restoration is complete, restoration must be performed from each incremental backup performed since that**

last full backup.

Failing to include any of the incremental backups necessary in Step 2 may lead to corrupt data, missing data, data being present that should not be, or inconsistent data.



WARNING Most modern backup software will warn (or prevent) you if you try to skip any incremental backups during an incremental restoration. Such software, however, sometimes does not, however, tell you if you're missing the final backup or backups in a series.

Incremental backups of systems

Incremental system backups are essentially updates to system images (or partial system images in the case of partial backups) that bring the image up to date as of the data that the backup was made. The incremental system backup contains copies of only the portion of the system that changed since the preceding backup (full or incremental) was run.

To restore from an incremental backup of a system:

- 1. A restoration must be done from the last full system backup.**
- 2. After that restoration is complete, restoration must be performed from each incremental backup performed since that system image was created.**

Failing to include any of the incremental backups necessary in Step 2 may lead to corrupt or missing programs, data, operating system components, and incompatibility issues between software. Most modern backup software will warn (or prevent) you if you try to skip various incrementals during a restore from an incremental backup. They often do not, however, tell you if you're missing the final backup or backups in a series.

Differential backups

Differential backups contain all the files that changed since the last full backup. (They are similar to the first in a series incremental backups run after a full backup.)



TIP While creating a series of differential backups usually takes more time than creating a series of incremental backups, restoring from differential backups is usually much simpler and faster.

To recover from a differential backup:

- 1. Perform a restoration from the last full system backup.**
- 2. After that restoration is complete, perform a restoration from the most recent differential backup.**

Be sure to restore from the last differential backup and not from any other differential backup.



TIP Many backup systems won't warn you if you attempt to restore from a differential backup other than the latest one. Be sure to double-check before restoring that you're using the latest one!

Table 15-1 shows the comparative restoration processes from full, incremental, and differential backups.

TABLE 15-1 Restoration Processes

<i>Full</i>			
	<i>Backup</i>	<i>Incremental Backup</i>	<i>Differential Backup</i>
After Backup #1	Restore from Backup #1	Restore from Backup #1 (Full)	Restore from Backup #1 (Full)
After Backup #2	Restore from Backup #2	Restore from Backups #1 and #2	Restore from Backups #1 and #2

<i>Full</i>	<i>Backup</i>	<i>Incremental Backup</i>	<i>Differential Backup</i>
After Backup #3	Restore from Backup #3	Restore from Backups #1, #2, and #3	Restore from Backups #1 and #3
After Backup #4	Restore from Backup #4	Restore from Backups #1, #2, #3, and #4	Restore from Backups #1 and #4

Continuous backups

Some continuous backups are ideal for performing system restore. Similar to a system image, they allow you to restore a system to the way that it looked at a certain point in time. Others are terrible for performing restores because they allow restoration to only the most recent version of the system, which often suffers from the need to be rebuilt in the first place.

In fact, the normal use of continuous backups is to address equipment failures, such as a hard drive suddenly going caput — not the rebuilding of systems after a security incident.

Furthermore, because continuous backups constantly propagate material from the device being backed up to the backup, any malware that was present on the primary system may be present on the backup.

Partial backups

Partial backups are backups of a portion of data. Likewise, partial backups are not intended to be full backups in case of a malware attack or the like. They are useful, however, in other situations, and you should be aware of how to restore from them.

If you have a particular set of files that are extremely sensitive and need to be backed up and stored separately from the rest of your system, you may use a partial backup for that data. If something happens and you need to rebuild a system or restore the sensitive data, you will need that separate partial backup from which to do the restore.

Digital private keys that provide access to cryptocurrency, email encryption/decryption capabilities, and so on, for example, are often

stored on such backups along with images of extremely sensitive documents.

Often, partial backups of sensitive data are performed to USB drives that are then locked in safes or safe deposit boxes. Restoring from the backup would, in such cases, demand that the restorer obtain the physical USB drive, which could mean a delay in restoration. If the need to restore arises at 6 p.m. Friday, for example, and the drive is in a safe deposit box that is not available until 9 a.m. Monday, the desired material may remain inaccessible to the user for almost three days.



REMEMBER Make sure that you store your partial backups in a manner that will allow you to access the backed-up data when you need it.

Another common scenario for specialized partial backups is when a network-based backup is used — especially within a small business — and a user needs to ensure that he or she has a backup of certain material in case of technical problems while traveling. Such backups should never be made without proper authorization. If permission has been obtained and a backup has been created, a user on the road who suffers a technical problem that requires restoration of data can do the restore by copying the files from the USB drive (after, presumably, decrypting the files using a strong password or some form of multifactor authentication).

Folder backups

Folder backups are similar to partial backups because the set of items being backed up is a particular folder. If you performed a folder backup using a backup tool, you can restore it using the techniques described in the preceding section.

The restore process is different if, however, you created the relevant backup by simply copying a folder or set of folders to an external drive (hard drive, SSDs, USB drive, or network drive).

Theoretically, you simply copy the backup copy of the folder or folders to the location of the original folder. However, doing so will potentially overwrite the contents of the primary folder, so any changes made since the backup will be lost.

Drive backups

A *drive backup* is similar to a folder backup, but an entire drive is backed up instead of a folder.

If you backed up a drive with backup software, you can restore it via that software.

If you backed up a drive by copying the contents of the drive somewhere else, you will need to manually copy them back. Such a restore may not work perfectly, however. Hidden and system files may not be restored, so a bootable drive backed up and restored in such a fashion may not remain bootable.

Virtual-drive backups

If you backed up an encrypted virtual drive, such as a BitLocker drive that you mount on your computer, you can restore the entire drive in one shot or restore individual files and folders from the drive.

Restoring the entire virtual drive

To restore the entire virtual drive in one shot, make sure the existing copy of the drive is not mounted. The easiest way to do so is to boot your computer and not mount any Bitlocker drives.

If your computer is booted already and the drive is mounted, simply dismount it:

- 1. Choose Startup ⇒ This PC.**
- 2. Locate the mounted Bitlocker drive.**

The drive appears with an icon of a lock indicating that it is encrypted.

- 3. Right-click on the drive and select Eject.** Once the drive is dismounted, it disappears from the This PC list of drives.

After the drive is unmounted, copy the backup copy of the drive to the primary drive location and replace the file containing the drive.

You can then unlock and mount the drive.

Restoring files and/or folders from the virtual drive

To restore individual files or folders from the virtual drive, mount the backup as a separate virtual drive and copy the files and folders from the backup to the primary as if you were copying files between any two drives.



TIP Ideally, you should back up the backup of the virtual drive before mounting it and copying files and/or folders from it and mount it read-only when you mount it.



TIP Always unmount the backup drive after copying files to the primary. Leaving it mounted — which inherently means that two copies of a large portion of your file system are in use at the same time — can lead to human mistakes.

Dealing with Deletions

One of the problems of restoring from any restore that does not entirely overwrite your data with a new copy is that the restore may not restore deletions.

For example, if after making a full backup, you delete a file, create ten new files, modify two data files, and then perform an incremental backup, the incremental backup may or may not record the deletion. If you restore from the full backup and then restore from the incremental, the restore from the incremental should delete the file, add the ten new files, and modify the two files to the newer version. In some cases,

however, the file that you previously deleted may remain because some backup tools do not properly account for deletions.

Even when this problem happens, it is not usually critical. You just want to be aware of it. Of course, if you've deleted sensitive files in the past, you should check whether a restoration restored them to your computer. (If you intend to permanently and totally destroy a file or set of files, you should also remove it/them from your backups.)

Excluding Files and Folders

Some files and folders should not be restored during a restoration. In truth, they should not have been backed up in the first place unless you imaged a disk, but in many cases, people do back them up anyway.

The following are examples of some such files and folders that can be excluded from typical restorations done on a Windows 10 machine. If you're using backup software, the software likely excluded these files when creating the backup. If you are copying files manually, you may have backed them up.

- » Contents of the Recycle Bin
- » Browser caches (temporary Internet files from web browsers, such as Microsoft Edge or Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, Vivaldi, or Opera)
- » Temporary folders (often called Temp or tem and reside in C:\, in the user directory, or in the data directory of software)
- » Temporary files (usually files named *.tmp or *.temp)
- » Operating system swap files (pagefile.sys)
- » Operating system hibernation-mode system image information (hyperfil.sys)
- » Backups (unless you want to back up your backups) such as Windows File History backup

- » Operating system files backed up during an operating system upgrade (usually found in C:\Windows.old on Windows computers that have had their operating systems upgraded)
- » Microsoft Outlook cache files (*.ost — note that Outlook local data stores [*.pst] should be backed up; in fact, in many cases they may be the most critical files in a backup)
- » Performance log files in directories called PerfLogs
- » Junk files that users create as personal temporary files to hold information (for example, a text file in which the user types a phone number that someone dictated to him or her, but which the user has since entered into his or her smartphone directory)

In-app backups

Some applications have built-in backup capabilities that protect you from losing your work if your computer crashes, power fails and you don't have battery power left, and other mishaps.

Some such applications will automatically prompt you to restore documents that would otherwise have been lost due to a system crash or the like. When you start Microsoft Word after an abnormal shutdown of the application, for example, it provides a list of documents that can be autorecovered — sometimes even offering multiple versions of the same document.

Understanding Archives

The term *archive* has multiple meanings in the world of information technology. I describe the relevant meanings in the following sections.

Multiple files stored within one file

Sometimes multiple files can be stored within a single file. This concept was addressed with the concept of virtual drives earlier in this chapter and in [Chapter 13](#). However, storing multiple files within one file does not necessitate the creation of virtual drives.

You may have seen files with the extension .zip, for example. *ZIP files*, as such files are called, are effectively containers that hold one or more compressed files. Storing multiple files in such a container allows for far easier transfer of files (a single ZIP file attached to an email is far easier to manage than 50 small individual files). It also reduces the amount (sometimes significantly) of disk space and Internet bandwidth necessary to store and move the files.

If you need to restore files from an archive, you can either extract all the files from the archive to your primary source, or you can open the archive and copy the individual files to your primary location as you would with any files found in any other folder.

Archive files come in many different formats. Some appear automatically as folders within Windows and Mac file systems and their contents as files and folders within folders. Others require special software to be viewed and extracted from.

Old live data

Sometimes old data is moved off of primary systems and stored elsewhere. Storing old data can improve performance. For example, if a search of all email items means searching through 25 years' worth of messages, the search will take far longer than a search through just the last 3 years. If nearly all relevant results will always be within the last few years, the older emails can be moved to a separate archive where you can access and search them separately if need be.

If you use archiving, factor that in when restoring data. You want to ensure that archives are restored to archives and that you don't accidentally restore archives to the primary data stores.

Old versions of files, folders, or backups

The term *archives* is also sometimes used to refer to old versions of files, folders, and backups even if those files are stored on the primary data store. Someone who has ten versions of a contract, for example, that were executed at different points in time, may keep all the Word versions of these documents in an Archive folder.

Archiving of this sort can be done for any one or more of many reasons. One common rationale is to avoid accidentally using an old version of a document when the current version should be used.

If you're archiving, factor that in when restoring data. Restore all the archives to their proper locations. You may see multiple copies of the same file being restored; don't assume that that is an error.

Restoring Using Backup Tools

Restoring using backup software is similar to the process of backing up using backup software.

To restore using the backup software that was utilized to create the backups from which you are restoring, run the software (in some cases, you may need to install the software onto the machine, rather than run it from a CD or the like) and select Restore.

When you restore, make sure that you select the correct backup version to restore from.



WARNING Beware of bogus restoration prompts! Various forms of malware present bogus prompts advising you that your hard drive has suffered some sort of malfunction and that you must run a restore routine to repair data. Only run restores from software that you obtained from a reliable source and that you know that you can trust!

Many modern backup software packages hide the approach used to back up — full, differential, incremental, and so on — from users and instead allow users to pick which version of files they want to restore.

If you're restoring using the specialized backup and recovery software that came with an external hard drive or solid-state device that you use to back up your device, attach the drive, run the software (unless it runs automatically), and follow the prompt to restore.

Such software is usually simple to use; restoration typically works like a simplified version of that done using other backup software (see preceding section).



REMEMBER Disconnect the drive from the system after performing the restore!

Restoring from a Windows backup

To restore from a Windows backup to the original locations from which the data was backed up, follow these steps:

1. Choose Start ⇒ Settings ⇒ Update & Security ⇒ Backup.
2. Click on Restore files from a current backup.
3. In the File System viewer, browse through different versions of your folders and files or type and search for the name of the file you're looking for.
4. Select what you want to restore.
5. Click on Restore.

Restoring to a system restore point

Microsoft Windows allows you to restore your system to the way it looked at a specific time at which the system was imaged by the operating system:

1. Click on the Start button and select Settings.
2. Choose Control Panel ⇒ System and Maintenance ⇒ Backup and Restore.
3. Click on Restore My Files to restore your files or Restore All Users' Files to restore all users files (assuming that you have permissions to do so).

Restoring from a smartphone/tablet backup

Many portable devices come equipped with the ability to automatically sync your data to the cloud, which allows you to restore the data to a new device if your device is lost or stolen.

Even devices that do not have such a feature built in almost always can run software that effectively delivers such features for a specific folder tree or drive.

When you start an Android device for the first time after a factory reset, you may be prompted if you want to restore your data. If you are, restoring is pretty straightforward. Answer yes.

While the exact routines may vary between devices and manufacturers, other forms of restore generally follow some flavor of the following process:

To restore contacts from an SD card:

- 1. Open the Contacts App.**

If there is an import feature, select it and jump to Step 4.

- 2. Select Settings from the main menu (or click on the Settings icon).**

If you aren't displaying all contacts, you may need to click the Display menu and select All Contacts.

- 3. Select Import / Export Contacts (or, if that option is not available, select Manage Contacts and then select Import Contacts on the next screen).**

- 4. Select Import from SD Card.**

- 5. Review the file name for the backup of the Contact list then click on OK.**

Contacts are often backed up (or exported to) VCF files.

To restore media (pictures, videos, and audio files) from an SD card:

- 1. Using File Manager, open the SD card.**

- 2. Click to turn on check boxes next to the file or files that you want to restore.**
- 3. To copy files to the phone's memory, go to the menu and select Copy ⇒ Internal Storage.**
- 4. Select the folder to which you want to copy the files or create the folder and move into it.**
- 5. Select Copy Here.**

Restoring from manual file or folder copying backups

To restore from a manual file or folder copy, just copy the file or folder from the backup to the main data store. (If you are overwriting a file or folder, you may receive a warning from the operating system.)



REMEMBER Disconnect the media on which the backup is located from the main store when you are done.

Utilizing third-party backups of data hosted at third parties

If you utilized the backup capabilities of a third-party provider at which you store data in the cloud or whose cloud-based services you utilize, you may be able to restore your relevant data through an interface provided by the third-party provider.

If you use a third-party cloud-based-service provider and you have not performed backups, you may still be able to restore data. Contact your provider. The provider itself may have backed up the data without notifying you.



TIP While you should never rely on your cloud service provider performing backups that you did not order, if you are in a jam and contact the provider, you may (or may not) be pleasantly surprised to find out that they do have backups from which you can restore.

Returning Backups to Their Proper Locations

After you restore from a physical backup, you need to return it to its proper location for several reasons:

- » You do not want it to be misplaced if you ever need it again.
- » You do not want it to be stolen.
- » You want to ensure that you do not undermine any storage strategies and procedures intended to keep backups in different locations than the data stores that they back up.

Network storage

Ideally, when restoring from a network-based backup, you should mount the network drive as read-only to prevent possible corruptions of the backup. Furthermore, be sure to disconnect from the network data store once you are done performing the restoration.



TIP Make sure that whatever mechanism you are using to run the restore (for example, backup software) has the proper network permissions to write to the primary data storage location.

Restoring from a combination of locations

There is no reason to back up to only one location. Restoration, however, typically will utilize backups from only one location at a time.

If you do need to restore from backups that are physically situated at more than one location, be extremely careful not to restore the wrong versions of files as some of the files may exist on multiple backups.

Restoring to Non-Original Locations

When it comes to restoring data, some folks choose to restore to locations other than original locations, test the restored data, and then copy or move it to the original locations. Such a strategy reduces the likelihood of writing over good data with bad data. You can make a bad day worse if you lose some of your data and discover that your backup of the data is corrupted. If you then restore from that backup over your original data and thereby corrupt it, you lose even more of your data.

Never Leave Your Backups Connected



WARNING After restoring, never leave backup hard drives or solid-state drives connected to the systems or networks that they are backing up. Any future malware infections that attack the primary system can spread to the backups as well. Removing your backup from being connected to the material that it is backing up can make all the difference between quickly recovering from a ransomware attack and having to pay an expensive ransom to a criminal.

If you back up to write-once read-many-times media, such as CD-Rs, it is theoretically safe to leave the backup in an attached drive after you finalize the restoration, but you still should not do so. You want the backup to be readily available in its proper location in case you ever need it in the future.

Restoring from Encrypted Backups

Restoring from encrypted backups is essentially the same as restoring from non-encrypted backups except that you need to unlock the backups prior to restoration.

Backups that are protected by a password obviously need the proper password to be entered. Backups protected by certificates or other more advanced forms of encryption may require that a user possess a physical item or digital certificate in order to restore.

In most cases, security conscious home users protect their backups with passwords. If you do so (and you should), do not forget your password.

Testing Backups

Many folks have thought that they had proper backups only to discover when they needed to restore that the backups were corrupted. Hence, testing backups is critical.

While theoretically you should test every backup that you make and test every single item within the backup can be restored, such a scheme is impractical for most people. But do test the first backup that you make with any software, check the auto-recover files the first time that you use Word, and so on.

Some backup software comes with the capability to verify backups — that is, after making a backup, it checks that the original data and data in the backups matches. Running such verification after making a backup adds significant time to the backup process. However, it's well worth running if you can do so because it helps ensure that nothing was improperly recorded or otherwise corrupted during the backup process.

Restoring Cryptocurrency

Restoring cryptocurrency after it is erased from a computer or some other device it was stored on is totally different than any of the restore

processes described in this chapter.

Technically speaking, cryptocurrency is tracked on a ledger, not stored anywhere, so the restoration is not to restore the actual cryptocurrency, but rather to restore the private keys needed in order to control the addresses within the ledger at which the cryptocurrency is stored. (I hate the term *digital wallets* as applied to cryptocurrency — we store digital keys, not cryptocurrency, in a digital wallet. The name *digital keyring* would have been far more accurate and less confusing.)

Hopefully, if you lost the device on which your cryptocurrency is stored, you have the keys printed on paper that is stored in a safe or safe deposit box. Obtain the paper, and you have your keys. Just don't leave the paper lying around; put it back into the secure location ASAP. (If you keep the paper in a safe deposit box, consider performing the restoration technique at the bank so that you never take the paper out of the safe deposit box area.)

If you store cryptocurrency at an exchange, you can restore your credentials to the exchange through whatever means the exchange allows. Ideally, if you properly backed up your passwords to a secure location, you can just obtain and use them.

For those who use hardware wallets to store the keys to their cryptocurrency, the backup for the wallet device is often a *recovery seed*, which is a list of words that allows the device to re-create the keys needed for the relevant addresses. It is generally accepted that the list of words should be written down on paper and stored in a bank vault and/or safe, not stored electronically.

Booting from a Boot Disk

If you ever need to boot from a boot disk that you created (as might be necessary during a system reset and restore process), boot your system, go into the BIOS settings, and set the boot order to start with the disk from which you want to boot. Then restart the system.

Part 7

Looking toward the Future

IN THIS PART ...

Explore cybersecurity careers.

Discover emerging technologies.

Chapter 16

Pursuing a Cybersecurity Career

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering various cybersecurity-related positions
 - » Looking at cybersecurity career paths
 - » Understanding cybersecurity certifications
 - » Finding out how to get started
-

With a global shortage of competent cybersecurity professionals, there has never been a better time to pursue a career — especially since the shortage seems to grow with the passage of time.

As a result of an insufficient supply of cybersecurity professionals to satisfy the demand for people with relevant skills, compensation packages earned by cybersecurity professionals are among the best found among technology workers.

In this chapter, you find out about some of the professional roles in the cybersecurity field, potential career paths, and certifications.

Professional Roles in Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity professionals have a wide range of responsibilities that vary quite a bit based on their exact roles, but most, if not all, ultimately work to help either protect data and systems from being compromised, or, in the case of certain government positions, to breach the systems and compromise the data of adversaries.

No one, single career path called “cybersecurity” exists. The profession has many nuances, and different paths along which people’s careers can

progress.

Security engineer

Security engineers come in multiple types, but the vast majority are hands-on technical folks who build, maintain, and debug information security systems as part of organizational (corporate, government, or nonprofit) projects. Security engineers working in the professional services arms of vendors may also help ensure that software being deployed at clients is done so in a secure fashion.

Security manager

Security managers are typically mid-level management within larger enterprises who have responsibility for some specific area of information security. One security manager, may, for example, be responsible for all of a firm's security training, and another may be responsible for overseeing all of its Internet-facing firewalls. People in security manager positions typically perform less hands-on, technically detailed security activities than do the folks who report to them.

Security director

Security directors are the people who oversee information security for an organization. In smaller firms, the director is usually the de facto chief information security officer (CISO). Larger firms may have several directors responsible for various subsets of the firm's information security program; such folks, in turn, usually report to the CISO.

Chief information security officer (CISO)

The *CISO* is the person responsible for information security throughout an organization. You can think of the CISO role as being that of the chief of staff of the organization's information-security defensive military.

The CISO is a senior, C-level management position. Serving as a CISO usually requires significant management knowledge and experience, in addition to an understanding of information security.

Security analyst

Security analysts work to prevent information security breaches. They review not only existing systems, but study emerging threats, new vulnerabilities, and so on in order to ensure that the organization remains safe.

Security architect

Security architects design and oversee the deployment of organizational information security countermeasures. They often have to understand, design, and test complex security infrastructures and regularly serve as the security team member who is involved in projects outside of the security department as well — for example, helping to design the security needed for a custom application that an organization is designing and building or helping to guide networking folks as the latter design various elements of corporate IT networking infrastructure.

Security administrator

Security administrators are hands-on folks who install, configure, operate, manage, and troubleshoot information security countermeasures on behalf of an organization. These folks are the ones to whom nontechnical professionals often refer when they say “I am having a problem and need to call the security guy or security gal.”

Security auditor

Security auditors conduct security audits — that is, they check that security policies, procedures, technologies, and so on are working as intended and are effectively and adequately protecting corporate data, systems, and networks.

Cryptographer

Cryptographers are experts at and work with encryption, as used to protect sensitive data.

Some cryptographers work to develop encryption systems to protect sensitive data, while others, known as *cryptanalysts*, do the opposite: analyzing encrypted information and encryption systems in order to break the encryption and decrypt the information.

As compared to other information security jobs, cryptographers disproportionately work for government agencies, the military, and in academia. In the United States, many government jobs in cryptography require U.S. citizenship and an active security clearance.

Vulnerability assessment analyst

Vulnerability assessment analysts examine computer systems, databases, networks, and other portions of the information infrastructure in search of potential vulnerabilities. The folks working in such positions must have explicit permission to do so. Unlike penetration testers, described in the next section, vulnerability assessors don't typically act as outsiders trying to breach systems, but as insiders who have access to systems and have the ability to examine them in detail from the start.

Ethical hacker

Ethical hackers attempt to attack, penetrate, and otherwise compromise systems and networks on behalf of — and with the explicit permission of — the technologies' owners in order to discover security vulnerabilities that the owners can then fix. Ethical hackers are sometimes referred to as *penetration testers* or *pen-testers*. While many corporations employ their own ethical hackers, a significant number of folks who work in such positions work for consulting companies offering their services to third parties.

Security researcher

Security researchers are forward-looking folks who seek to discover vulnerabilities in existing systems and potential security ramifications of new technologies and other products. They sometimes develop new security models and approaches based on their research.



WARNING As far as ethics are concerned, and as far as most jurisdictions are concerned, a security researcher who hacks an organization without explicit permission from that organization is not a security researcher or an ethical hacker, but simply someone breaking the law.

Offensive hacker

Offensive hackers attempt to break into adversaries' systems to either cripple the systems or steal information.

In the United States of America, it is illegal for a business to go on the offensive and attack anyone — including striking back at hackers who are actively trying to penetrate the organization. As such, all legal offensive hacking jobs in the United States are government positions, such as with intelligence agencies. If you enjoy attacking and are not satisfied with just ethical hacking, you may wish to pursue a career with the government or military. Many offensive hacking positions require security clearances.

Software security engineer

Software security engineers integrate security into software as it is designed and developed. They also test the software to make sure it has no vulnerabilities. In some cases, they may be the coders of the software itself.

Software source code security auditor

Software source code security auditors review the source code of programs in search of programming errors, vulnerabilities, violations of corporate policies and standards, regulatory problems, copyright infringement (and, in some cases, patent infringement), and other issues that either must be, or should be, resolved.

Software security manager

Secure development managers oversee the security of software throughout the software's life cycle — from initial business requirements gathering all the way through disposal.

Security consultant

There are many different types of *security consultants*. Some, like the author of this book, advise corporate executives on security strategy, serve as expert witnesses, or help security companies grow and succeed. Others are hands-on penetration testers. Others may design or operate components of security infrastructure, focusing on specific technologies. When it comes to security consulting, you can find positions in just about every area of information security.

Security specialist

The title *security specialist* is used to refer to people serving in many different types of roles. All the various roles, however, tend to require at least several years of professional experience working in the information security field.

Incident response team member

The *incident response team* consists of the de facto first responders who deal with security incidents. Team members seek to contain and eliminate attacks, while minimizing the damage from them. They also often perform some of the analysis into what happened — sometimes determining that nothing requires any corrective activity. You can think of incident responders as roughly the equivalent of cybersecurity firefighters — they deal with dangerous attacks, but sometimes get called in to verify that there is no fire.

Forensic analyst

Forensic analysts are effectively digital detectives, who, after some sort of computer event, examine data, computers and computing devices, and networks to gather, analyze, and properly preserve evidence and deduce what exactly happened, how it was possible to happen, and who did it. You can think of forensic analysts as roughly the equivalent of law

enforcement and insurance company inspectors who analyze properties after a fire to determine what happened and who might be responsible.

Cybersecurity regulations expert

Cybersecurity regulations experts are knowledgeable in the various regulations related to cybersecurity and help ensure that organizations comply with such regulations. They are often, but not always, attorneys who have prior experience working with various compliance-type matters.

Privacy regulations expert

Privacy regulations experts are knowledgeable in the various regulations related to privacy and help ensure that organizations comply with such regulations. They are often, but not always, attorneys who have prior experience working with various compliance-type matters.

Exploring Career Paths

Folks in information security can pursue multiple different career paths. Some involve becoming technical gurus focused on specific subsections of security, while others require broad knowledge of the discipline and interfacing with many different areas of a business. Still others focus on management.



TIP People should consider their long-term goals as they plan their careers. For example, if you're looking to become a CISO, you may want to work in a variety of different hands-on positions, earn an MBA, and pursue promotions and certifications in areas of information security management, while if you want to become a senior architect, you'll likely be better off focusing on promotions into various roles involved in security analysis and design, doing penetration testing, and earning technical degrees.

The following sections give examples of some potential career paths.

Career path: Senior security architect

In the United States, security architects typically earn well over \$100,000 — and, in some markets, considerably more — making this type of position quite attractive. While every person's career path is unique, one typical framework for becoming a senior security architect might be to follow a career path similar to the following:

1. Do one of the following:

- Earn a bachelor's degree in computer science.
- Earn a degree in any field and pass an entry-level certification exam in cybersecurity (for example, Security+).
- Obtain a technical job while without a degree and demonstrate proficiency in the relevant technologies used as part of the job.

2. Work as a network administrator or systems administrator and gain hands on security experience.

3. Obtain a slightly more focused credential (for example, CEH).
4. Work as a security administrator — preferably administering a range of different security systems over a period of several years.
5. Earn one or more general security certifications (for example, CISSP).
6. Become a security architect and gain experience in such a role.
7. Earn an advanced security architecture certification (for example, CISSP-ISSAP).
8. Become a senior level security architect.



WARNING Do not expect to become a senior-level architect overnight; it often takes a decade or more of relevant experience to achieve such a position.

Career path: CISO

In the United States, chief information security officers typically earn \$150,000 or more (a lot more in certain industries), but, the jobs can be quite stressful — CISOs are responsible for corporate information security — which often involves dealing with emergencies. While every person's career path is unique, one typical framework for becoming a CISO might be to follow a career path similar to the following:

- 1. Earn a bachelor's degree in computer science or in information technology.**
- 2. Do one of the following:**
 - Work as a systems analyst, systems engineer, programmer, or in some other related hands-on technical position.
 - Work as a network engineer.
- 3. Migrate toward security and work as a security engineer, security analyst, or security consultant — taking on various different roles within an organization, or as a consultant to organizations, thereby exposing oneself to various different areas of information security.**
- 4. Obtain general certifications in information security (for example, CISSP).**
- 5. Migrate toward management of security by becoming the manager of a security operations team. Ideally, over time, manage multiple information security teams, each that deals with different areas of information security than the others.**
- 6. Do one of the following:**
 - Earn a master's degree in cybersecurity (ideally with a focus on information security management).
 - Earn a master's in computer science (ideally with a focus on cybersecurity).
 - Earn a master's in information systems management (ideally, with a focus on information security).

- Earn an MBA.

7. Do one of the following:

- Become a divisional CISO (de facto or de jure).
- Become the CISO of a relatively small business or nonprofit organization.

8. Obtain an advanced information security credential focused on information security management (for example, CISSP-ISSMP).

9. Become the CISO of a larger business.



WARNING The path to becoming a CISO can easily take a decade, or even decades, depending on the size of the organization in which the CISO serves.

Starting Out in Information Security

Many folks who work in information security began their careers in other areas of information technology. In some cases, the folks were first exposed to the amazing world of cybersecurity while serving in technical positions. In other situations, people took technical jobs not directly tied to information security, but did so with the intent of developing various skills and using the positions as stepping stones into the world of security.



TIP Jobs in the fields of risk analysis, systems engineering and development, and networking are often good entry points. An email administrator, for example, is likely to learn plenty about email security and possibly also about the architecture of secure network designs and securing servers in general. People developing web-based systems are likely to learn about web security as well as about secure software design. And system and network administrators are going to learn about the security of the items that they are responsible to keep alive and healthy.

Some of the technical jobs that can help prepare you for cybersecurity-related roles include

- » Programmer
- » Software engineer
- » Web developer
- » Information systems support engineer (technical support hands-on specialist)
- » Systems administrator
- » Email administrator
- » Network administrator
- » Database administrator
- » Website administrator

Some nontechnical positions can also help prepare people for careers in the nontechnical roles of information security. Here are some examples:

- » Auditor
- » Law enforcement detective
- » Attorney focusing on cybersecurity-related areas of law

- » Attorney focusing on regulatory compliance
- » Attorney focusing on privacy-related areas of law
- » Risk-management analyst

Exploring Popular Certifications

Recognized cybersecurity certifications and, to a lesser degree, certificates showing successful completion of cybersecurity courses, can prove to an employer that your cybersecurity knowledge meets certain standards and help you advance along your desired career path.

Many different information-security certifications are on the market today. Some focus on specific technologies or areas of information security, while others are more broad.

While it is beyond the scope of this book to explore each and every possible certification available today, the following are five of the more popular — and better recognized — vendor-neutral certifications that may be ideal for folks relatively early in their cybersecurity careers.

CISSP

The Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) certification, initially launched in 1994, covers a broad range of security-related domains, delving into details in some areas more than in others. It provides employers with the comfort of knowing that workers understand important aspects of more than just one or two areas of information security; as components of information security are often highly interconnected, broad knowledge is valuable, and becomes absolutely necessary as one ascends the information-security management ladder.

The CISSP is intended to be pursued by people with several years of experience in the information security field — in fact, while you can take the CISSP exam without experience, you won't actually receive the credential until you work in the field for the required number of years. As a result, folks possessing CISSP credentials, who always have several

years of experience under their belts, often command higher salaries than do both their uncertified peers and counterparts holding other certifications.

The CISSP credential, issued by the highly regarded (ISC)2 organization, is both vendor neutral and more evergreen than many other certifications. Study materials and training courses for CISSP exam are widely available, and tests are administered in more locations, and on more dates, than are most other, if not all other, cybersecurity certifications. Multiple add-ons to the CISSP are available for those interested in proving their mastery of information security architecture (CISSP-ISSAP), management (CISSP-ISSMP), and engineering (CISSP-ISSEP).

(ISC)2 requires that holders of the CISSP credentials accept to abide by a specific Code of Ethics and that they perform significant continuing education activities in order to maintain their credentials, which must be renewed every three years.



REMEMBER The CISSP is not intended to test hands-on technical skills — and does not do so. People looking to demonstrate mastery of specific technologies or areas of technology — for example, penetration testing, security administration, auditing, and so on — may want to consider pursuing either a more technically focused, general certification or some specific product and skill certifications.

(For full disclosure, the author of this book holds a CISSP certification, as well as two add-on credentials — CISSP-ISSAP and CISSP-ISSMP — and authored (ISC)2's official study guide for the CISSP-ISSMP exam.)

CISM

The well-regarded Certified Information Security Manager (CISM) credential from the Information Systems Audit and Control Association

(ISACA) has exploded in popularity since its inception a little under two decades ago.

Emanating from an organization focused on audit and controls, the CISM credential is, generally speaking, a bit more focused than is the CISSP on policies, procedures, and technologies for information security systems management and control, as typically occurs within large enterprises or organizations.

As with the CISSP, to earn a CISM, a candidate must have several years of professional information-security work experience. Despite the differences between the CISSP and CISM — with the former delving deeper into technical topics and the latter doing similarly for management-related topics — the two offerings also significantly overlap. Both are well respected.

CEH

The Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH), offered by the International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council), is intended for people with at least two years of professional experience who are intent on establishing their credibility as ethical hackers (in other words, penetration testers).

CEH is a practical exam that tests candidates' skills as related to hacking: from performing reconnaissance and penetrating networks to escalating privileges and stealing data. This exam tests a variety of practical skills, including attack vehicles, such as various types of malware; attack techniques, such as SQL injection; cryptanalysis methods used to undermine encryption; methods of social engineering in order to undermine technical defenses via human error; and how hackers can evade detection by covering their tracks.

EC-Council requires CEH credential holders to acquire a significant number of continuing education credits in order to maintain a CEH credential — something quite important for an exam that tests practical knowledge — especially when you consider how rapidly technologies change in today's world.

Security+

Security+ is a vendor-neutral general cybersecurity certification that can be valuable especially for people early in their careers. It is offered and administered by the well-respected, technology-education nonprofit, CompTIA. While there is, technically speaking, no minimum number of years of professional experience required in order to earn a CompTIA Security+ designation, from a practical perspective, most people will likely find it easier to pass the exam after working in the field, and gaining practical experience, for a year or two.

The Security+ exam typically goes into more technical detail than either the CISSP or the CISM, directly addressing the knowledge needed to perform roles such as those related to entry-level IT auditing, penetration testing, systems administration, network administration, and security administration; hence, CompTIA Security+ is a good early-career certification for many folks.

Anyone earning the Security+ designation since 2011 must earn continuing education credits in order to maintain the credential.

GSEC

The Global Information Assurance Certification Security Essentials Certification (GSEC) is the entry-level security certification covering materials in courses run by the SANS Institute, a well-respected information-security training company.

Like Security+, GSEC contains a lot more hands-on practical material than the CISM or CISSP certifications, making this certification more valuable than the aforementioned alternatives in some scenarios and less desirable in others. Despite being marketed as entry-level, the GSEC exam is, generally speaking, regarded as more difficult and comprehensive than the test required to earn a Security+ designation.

All GSEC credential holders must show continued professional experience or educational growth in the field of information security in order to maintain their credentials.

Verifiability

The issuers of all major information security credentials provide employers with the ability to verify that a person holds any credentials claimed. For security reasons, such verification may require knowledge of the user's certification identification number, which credential holders typically do not publicize.



WARNING If you earn a certification, be sure to keep your information in the issuer's database up to date. You do not want to lose your certification because you did not receive a reminder to submit continuing education credits or to pay a maintenance fee.

Ethics

Many security certifications require credential holders to adhere to a code of ethics that not only mandates that holders comply with all relevant laws and government regulations, but also mandates that people act appropriately even in manners that exceed the letter of the law.



WARNING Be sure to understand such requirements. Losing a credential due to unethical behavior can obviously severely erode the trust that other people place in a person and can inflict all sorts of negative consequences on your career in information security.

Overcoming a Criminal Record

While a criminal record does not prevent someone from obtaining many cybersecurity-related jobs, a criminal record may be an insurmountable barrier when it comes to obtaining certain positions. Anything that prevents someone from obtaining a security clearance, for example, would disqualify that individual from working in certain government and government-contractor roles.

In some cases, the nature, timing, and age at which one committed past crimes may weigh heavily in an employer's decision. Some information-security organizations may be perfectly fine with hiring a reformed, former teenage hacker, for example, but may be averse to hiring someone who was convicted of a violent crime as an adult. Likewise, someone who served time in prison for a computer crime that he or she committed two decades ago, but whose record has since been clean, may be viewed quite differently by a potential employer than someone who was just recently released from prison after serving a sentence for a similar crime.

Looking at Other Professions with a Cybersecurity Focus

Besides working directly in cybersecurity, there are many opportunities to work in fields that interface directly with cybersecurity professionals, and which benefit from the global increase in attention to cybersecurity.

Lawyers may decide, for example, to specialize in cybersecurity-related laws or on firms' compliance with privacy regulations, and law enforcement personnel may develop expertise in the forensics that are utilized investigating cybercrimes.

The bottom line is that cybersecurity has created, is creating, and will continue to create for the foreseeable future many lucrative professional opportunities for people in multiple fields. You need not be a technical genius to benefit from the discipline's boom.

If you find cybersecurity fascinating, you may want to explore the opportunities that it may offer you.

Chapter 17

Emerging Technologies Bring New Threats

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding emerging technologies and their potential impact on cybersecurity
 - » Experiencing virtual reality and augmented reality
-

The world has undergone a radical transformation in recent decades, with the addition of the benefits digital computing power to just about every aspect of human lives. Within the course of just one generation, Western society has evolved from single-purpose film cameras, photocopiers, closed circuit television, and radio-wave based music broadcast receivers to connected devices sporting the features of all these devices and many more — all within a single device.

Simultaneously, new, advanced computing technology models have emerged, creating tremendous potential for even greater incorporation of technology into daily lives. Offerings that would have been considered unrealistic science fiction just a few years ago have become so totally normal and ubiquitously deployed today that children don't always believe adults when the latter explain how much the world has changed in recent years.

With the advent of new technologies and the digital transformation of the human experience, however, also comes great information security risks. In this chapter, you discover some technologies that are rapidly changing the world and how they are impacting cybersecurity. This list of emerging technologies is by no means comprehensive. Technologies constantly evolve and therefore constantly create new information security challenges.

Relying on the Internet of Things

Not that long ago, the only devices that were connected to the Internet were classic computers — desktops, laptops, and servers. Today, however, is a different world.

From smartphones and security cameras to coffeemakers and exercise equipment, electronic devices of all types now have computers embedded within them, and many of these computers are constantly and perpetually connected to the Internet. The *Internet of Things (IoT)*, as the ecosystem of connected devices is commonly known, has been growing exponentially over the past few years.

And, ironically, while consumers see many such connected devices marketed to them in stores and online, the vast majority of IoT devices are actually components of commercial and industrial systems. In fact, some experts even believe that as much as 99 percent of connected nontraditional-computer devices live in commercial and industrial environments. The reliability of utilities, factories and other manufacturing facilities, hospitals, and most other elements of the backbone of today's economic and social existence depends heavily on having stable, secure technology.

Of course, any and all computing devices — whether classic computers or smart devices of other types — can suffer from vulnerabilities and are potentially hackable, and exploitable for nefarious purposes. Internet-connected cameras, for example, which are designed to allow people to watch homes or businesses from afar, can potentially allow unauthorized hackers to watch the same video feeds. Furthermore, such devices can be commandeered for use in attacking other devices. In fact, in October 2016, the Mirai Botnet attack leveraged many infected IoT devices in unison, and took the popular Dyn DNS service offline. *DNS* is the system that converts human-names for computers into machine-understandable Internet Protocol numeric addresses (IP addresses). As a result of the attack on Dyn, many high-profile websites and services, including Twitter, Netflix, GitHub, and Reddit, suffered de facto outages

as people could not reach the sites because the names in the URLs of the sites could not be translated to their proper Internet addresses.

Likewise, IoT creates tremendous potential for serious sabotage.

Consider the possible effects of hacking an industrial system involved in the manufacturing of some medical equipment. Could people die if bugs or backdoors were inserted into the code that runs on the computer embedded within the device and then is exploited once the device were in use?

Hacks undermining systems controlled by connected devices are possible — even when such systems are not connected to the public Internet (see the nearby sidebar).

STUXNET

Sometime in 2009 or 2010, malware now known as Stuxnet crippled an Iranian uranium refinement facility that was believed to have been enriching uranium for potential use in building nuclear weapons. The sophisticated cyberattack was widely believed to have been launched by a joint team of cyberwarriors from the United States and Israel.

Stuxnet targeted the Siemens industrial control systems that the Iranians were using to operate and manage uranium-refining centrifuges. The malware caused the control systems to send improper instructions to the centrifuges while reporting that everything was running properly. The cyberattack is believed to have both inappropriately increased and decreased the speed of centrifuges. The inappropriate changes of speed caused the centrifuges' aluminum tubes to suffer from unexpected stress and to expand as a result, eventually causing them to come in contact with other portions of the machine and severely damage the device.

There is little doubt that Stuxnet's operational success will motivate other cyberwarriors to launch similar types of attacks in the future.

Could you see hackers demanding ransoms in exchange for not releasing video from people's home security cameras?

Could you see hackers demanding ransoms in exchange for not causing people's refrigerators to turn off and ruin their food — or even find criminals who turn off fridges when people leave for work and turn them on before the victims return home, causing food to spoil in an effort to poison targeted individuals?

As smart cars (which include essentially every vehicle made in the last decade or more) become more common, could criminals potentially hack them and cause crashes? Or blackmail people into paying ransoms in exchange for not crashing their cars? Before answering that question, consider that security researchers have demonstrated on more than one occasion how hackers can take control of some vehicles and cause brakes to stop working.

What about when self-driving cars and self-driving trucks are the norm? The stakes will only grow as technology advances.

IoT opens up a world of possibilities. It also dramatically grows the attack surface that criminals can exploit and increases the stakes if cybersecurity is not properly maintained.

Using Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain

A *cryptocurrency* is a digital asset (sometimes thought of as a digital currency) designed to work as a medium of exchange that uses various aspects of cryptography to control the creation of units, verify the accuracy of transactions, and secure financial transactions.

Modern cryptocurrencies allow parties who do not trust one another to interact and conduct business without the need for a trusted third party. Cryptocurrencies utilize *blockchain technology* — that is, their transactions are recorded on a distributed ledger whose integrity is protected through the use of multiple techniques that are supposed to ensure that only accurate transactions will be respected by others viewing a copy of the ledger.

Because cryptocurrencies are tracked via lists of transactions in ledgers, there are technically no cryptocurrency wallets. The currency is virtual and not stored anywhere, even electronically. Rather, cryptocurrency owners are the parties who control the various addresses on the ledger that have cryptocurrency associated with them after performing all the transactions to date on the ledger.

For example, if Address 1 has 10 units of a cryptocurrency and Address 2 has 5 units of a cryptocurrency and a transaction is recorded showing that Address 1 sent 1 unit of cryptocurrency to Address 2, the result is that Address 1 has 9 units of cyrptocurrency and Address 2 has 6 units of cryptocurrency.

To ensure that only legitimate owners of cryptocurrency can send money from their addresses, cryptocurrencies typically utilize a sophisticated implementation of PKI where every address has its own public-private key pair, with the owner being the only one to possess the private key. Sending cryptocurrency from an address requires the signing of the outgoing transaction with its associated private key.

Because anyone with knowledge of the private key associated with a particular ledger address can steal whatever amount of cryptocurrency is recorded in the ledger as belonging to that address, and because cryptocurrencies are both liquid and difficult to track back to their real-life human or organizational owners, criminals often attempt to steal cryptocurrencies via hacking. If a crook obtains the private key to a cryptocurrency address from someone's computer, the crook can quickly and easily transfer his victim's cryptocurrency to another address that the criminal controls. In fact, if the criminal obtains the key in any way, he or she can steal the cryptocurrency without hacking anything. All he or she has to do is issue a transaction sending the money to some other address and sign the transaction with the private key.

Because cryptocurrencies are not managed centrally, even if such a theft is detected, the legitimate owner has little hope of recovering his or her money. Reversing a transaction would, in most cases, require an unachievable consensus of a majority of operators within the cryptocurrency's ecosystem and is exceedingly unlikely to happen unless enough cryptocurrency was stolen to undermine the integrity of the entire currency. Even in such cases, the forking of a new cryptocurrency may be required to achieve such a reversal, and many operators will still likely reject the undoing of transactions as being an even greater threat to the integrity of the cryptocurrency than is a major theft.

Besides providing hackers with an easy way to steal money, cryptocurrencies have also facilitated other forms of cybercrimes. Most ransoms demanded by ransomware, for example, are required to be paid in cryptocurrency. In fact, cryptocurrency is the lifeblood of ransomware. Unlike payments made by wire transfer or credit card, smartly made cryptocurrency payments are exceedingly hard to trace back to real life people and are effectively irreversible once a transaction has settled.

Likewise, criminals have the ability to *mine* cryptocurrency — that is, to perform various complex calculations needed to both settle cryptocurrency transactions and create new units of the cryptocurrency — by stealing processing power from others. Cryptomining malware, for example, surreptitiously commandeers infected computers' CPU cycles to perform such calculations and, when new units of cryptocurrency are generated, transfers control of them to the criminals operating the malware. Cryptocurrency mining provides a simple way for criminals to monetize their hacking. Hacked computers can thus be used to “print money” without the involvement of victims as is typically needed for many other forms of monetization, such as ransomware.

Criminals have also benefited from the dramatic rise in the value of cryptocurrency. For example, those who accepted Bitcoin as payment for ransomware ransoms several years ago and who did not entirely cash out their cryptocurrency enjoyed amazing returns — sometimes growing their dollar-value holdings by a factor of hundreds or even thousands. Some such criminals likely cashed out a portion of their cryptocurrencies during the 2017 market frenzy and may be sitting on small fortunes that they are now investing in creating new cybercrime technologies.



TIP The blockchain technology that serves as the underlying engine that powers cryptocurrencies also has potential uses within cybersecurity countermeasures. A distributed database may prove to be a better way to store information about backup servers and redundant capabilities than are existing structures because the

distributed nature dramatically increases the number of points of failure necessary to take down the entire system. Likewise, distributed defenses against DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks may prove to be both more effective and cost efficient than the present model of using single massive infrastructures to fight such attacks.

Blockchain also offers a way to create transparent records of transactions or of activities — transactions that are viewable by anyone, but not modifiable by anyone, and with only authorized parties able to create appropriate new transactions.

Optimizing Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence, technically speaking, refers to the ability of an electronic system to perceive its environment and take actions that maximize its likelihood of achieving its goals, even without prior knowledge about the specifics of the environment and the situation in which it finds itself.

If that definition sounds complicated, it is. The definition of artificial intelligence from a practical perspective seems to be a moving target. Concepts and systems that were considered to be forms of artificial intelligence a decade or two ago — for example facial recognition technologies — are often treated as classic computer systems today. Today, most people use the term artificial intelligence to refer to computer systems that learn — that is, they mimic the way that humans learn from past experiences to take specific courses of action when encountering a new experience. Instead of being preprogrammed to act based on a set of specific rules, artificially intelligent systems look at sets of data to create their own sets of generalized rules and make decisions accordingly. The systems then optimize their own rules as they encounter more data and see the effects of applying their rules to that data.

Artificial intelligence is likely to ultimately transform the human experience at least as much as did the Industrial Revolution. The

Industrial Revolution, of course, replaced human muscles with machines — the latter proving to be faster, more accurate, less prone to becoming tired or sick, and less costly than the former. Artificial intelligence is the replacement of human brains with computer thinking — and it will eventually also prove to be much faster, more accurate, and less prone to illness or sleepiness than any biological mind.

The era of artificial intelligence has several major impacts on cybersecurity:

- » An increased need for cybersecurity
- » The use of artificial intelligence as a security tool
- » The use of artificial intelligence as a hacking tool

Increased need for cybersecurity

As artificially intelligent systems become increasingly common, the need for strong cybersecurity grows dramatically. Computer systems can make increasingly important decisions without the involvement of humans, which means that the negative consequences of not adequately securing computer systems could increase dramatically. Imagine if a hospital deployed an artificially system to analyze medical images and report diagnoses. If such a system or its data were hacked, incorrect reports could occur and cause people to suffer or even die.

Unfortunately, such a problem is no longer theoretical (see the nearby sidebar).

AI CAN ALREADY FALSIFY MRI IMAGES AND PRODUCE INCORRECT MRI RESULTS

In 2019, Israeli researchers found that artificial intelligence technology could successfully modify medical images in such a way that it would consistently trick both radiologists and artificial intelligence systems designed to diagnose medical conditions based on scans, including reporting cancer when none existed and overlooking it when it did. Even after the researchers told the radiologists involved that AI was being used to manipulate the scan images, the radiologists were still unable to provide correct

diagnoses and incorrectly found cancer in 60 percent of the normal scans to which tumors had been artificially added and did not find cancer in 87 percent of the scans from which the AI had digitally removed tumors.

Of course, such research represents just the tip of the iceberg. Industrial AI systems can be manipulated to alter products in ways that increase danger, and artificially intelligent transportation technology designed to optimize routes and improve safety could be fed data that increase danger or create unnecessary delays.

Furthermore, because evildoers can undermine the integrity of artificially intelligent systems without hacking the systems but rather by simply introducing hard-to-find small changes into large data sets and because the decisions made by artificially intelligent systems are not based on predefined rules known to the humans who create the system, protecting all elements of such systems becomes critical. Once problems are introduced, humans and machines will likely not be able to find them or even know that something is amiss.

The bottom line is that for artificial intelligence projects to be successful, they must include heavy-duty cybersecurity.

Use as a cybersecurity tool

One of the biggest challenges facing cybersecurity operations professionals today is that it is practically impossible to dedicate sufficient time to analyze and act on all alerts produced by cybersecurity technologies. One of the first major uses for artificial intelligence in the realm of cybersecurity is as an agent that helps prioritize alerts. This agent first learns how systems are typically used and what types of activities are anomalous, as well as which old alerts actually indicated serious issues rather than benign activities or minor issues. Future iterations of such artificially intelligent systems will likely involve the AI itself actually acting upon the alerts rather than referring them to humans.

Use as a hacking tool

Artificial intelligence is not just a defensive tool; it can also be a powerful weapon in the hands of attackers. For obvious reasons, I don't provide details in this book as to how to use AI to launch advanced attacks, but I do discuss several general examples.

AI systems can, for example, be used to scan and analyze other systems in order to find programming errors and configuration mistakes. AI systems may also be used to analyze organization charts, social media, corporate websites, press releases, and so on in order to design — and perhaps even implement — maximally effective social engineering attacks.

AI can also be utilized to undermine authentication systems. For example, a system that is given a recording of a person saying many different things may be able to trick a voice-based authentication system by mimicking the relevant human — even if the authentication system asks the AI to enunciate words for which the AI has no recording of the human speaking.



REMEMBER The bottom line is that when it comes to the use of AI as a cybersecurity tool, it's likely a spy-versus-spy battle between cyberattackers and cyberdefenders, with each trying to build better and better AIs so as to defeat one another.

Experiencing Virtual Reality

Virtual reality refers to an experience taking place within a computer-generated reality rather than within the real world.

Current virtual reality technology typically requires users to wear some sort of headset that displays images to the user and that blocks the user's vision of the real world. (In some cases, in lieu of wearing a headset, a user enters a special room equipped with a projector or multiple projectors, which achieves a similar effect.) Those images, combined with sounds and, in some cases, physical movements and other human-

sensible experiences, cause the user to experience the virtual environment as if he or she were actually physically present in it. A person using virtual reality equipment can usually move, look, and interact with the virtual world.

Virtual reality typically incorporates at least visual and audio components, but may also deliver vibrations and other sensory experiences. Even without additional sensory information, a human may experience sensations because the human brain often interprets what it sees and hears in a virtual environment as if it were real. For example, someone riding a roller coaster in a virtual environment may feel his or her stomach drop when the roller coaster makes a sharp drop, even though, in reality, he or she is not moving.

Immersive virtual environments can be similar to or completely different from what a person would experience in the real world. Popular applications of virtual reality already include tourism (for example, walking through an art museum without actually being there), entertainment (first-person vantage point gaming), and educational purposes (virtual dissection).

Virtual reality systems, of course, are computer-based and, as a result, have many of the same security issues as other computer-based systems. But virtual reality also introduces many new security and privacy concerns:

- » Can someone hack VR ecosystems and launch visual attacks that trigger seizures or headaches? (Flashing strobe lights in various cartoons and other displays have been known to cause seizures.)
- » Can others make decisions about your physical abilities based on your performance in VR applications? Can governments, for example, refuse to issue drivers' licenses to people who perform poorly in VR driving games? Can auto insurance companies surreptitiously gather data about people's driving habits in the VR world and use it to selectively raise rates?
- » Can hackers digitally vandalize a virtual environment — substituting obscene content for art, for example, in a museum offering virtual

tours?

- » Can hackers impersonate an authority figure, such as a teacher in a virtual classroom, by creating an avatar that looks similar to one used by that person and thereby trick other users into taking harmful actions (for example, by asking people for the answers to their tests, which the crooks then steal and pass off as their own to the real teacher)?
- » Likewise, can hackers impersonate a coworker or family member and thereby obtain and abuse sensitive information?
- » Can hackers modify virtual worlds in ways that earn them money in the real world — for example, by adding tolls to enter various places?
- » Can hackers steal virtual currency used in various virtual worlds?
- » Can hackers usurp control over a user's experience to see what he or she experiences or even to modify it?

In theory, when it comes to new risks created by virtual reality, I can compile a list that would take up an entire book — and time will certainly tell which risks emerge as real-world problems.

Transforming Experiences with Augmented Reality

Augmented reality refers to technology in which computer-generated images sounds, smells, movements, and/or other sensory material are superimposed onto a user's experience of the real world, transforming the user's experience into a composite of both actual and artificial elements. Augmented reality technology can both add elements to a user's experience — for example, showing a user the name of a person above the person's head as that individual approaches the user — as well as remove or mask elements, such as converting Nazi flags into black rectangles with the words "Defeat hate" written on them.

Google Glass is an example of an early attempt at consumer-focused augmented reality that was a bit too early to market. Pokémon Go, on the other hand, was an example of a game using augmented reality that was a massive success.

GOOGLE GLASS

Google Glass is a smart glasses technology consisting of a display and camera device embedded within a pair of eyeglasses. A user wearing a pair of Google Glass eyeglasses sees information superimposed over his or her field of vision and can communicate with the glasses by speaking commands.

Google's first release of Google Glass in April 2013 generated controversy related to the potential privacy implications created by people wearing and utilizing such devices.

POKÉMON GO

Pokémon Go is an augmented reality game for mobile devices that was first released in July 2016 as a result of a collaboration between Niantic, Nintendo, and The Pokémon Company. The game, which is free to play but offers in-game items for a fee, became an immediate hit and was downloaded more than half a billion times by the end of 2016. It uses a mobile device's GPS to locate, capture, battle, and train virtual creatures, called Pokémon, which appear on the device's screen within the context of the player's real-world location, superimposed on the image that would result if the player were aiming his or her camera at some area within the field of view.

As of early 2019, the game is believed to have been downloaded more than 1 billion times and to have generated more than \$3 billion in worldwide revenue.

Augmented reality is likely to become a major part of modern life over the next decade. It will introduce many of the risks that virtual reality does, as well as risks associated with the merging of real and virtual worlds, such as configuring systems to improperly associate various elements in the real world with virtual data.

As with all emerging technologies, time will tell. But, if you decide to invest in AR or VR technology, be sure to understand any relevant security issues.

Part 8

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART ...

Find out how you can improve your cybersecurity without breaking the bank.

Learn from others' mistakes.

Learn how to safely use extremely convenient public Wi-Fi.

Chapter 18

Ten Ways You Can Improve Your Cybersecurity without Spending a Fortune

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding that you're a target
 - » Protecting yourself using security software
 - » Encrypting, backing up, and more
-

Not all security improvements require a large outlay of cash. In this chapter, you discover ten ways that you can quickly improve your cybersecurity without spending a lot of money.

Understand That You Are a Target

People who believe that hackers want to breach their computers and phones and that criminals want to steal their data act differently than people who do not understand the true nature of the threat. Internalizing today's reality will help introduce into you healthy skepticism, as well as impact your attitude and behavior in numerous other ways — many of which you may not even consciously realize are being affected.

For example, when you believe that you're a target of cyberattackers, you're less likely to blindly trust that emails that you receive from your bank were actually sent by the bank, and, as such, you're less likely to fall prey to phishing scams than are people who believe that they are not targets. People who believe that criminals are after their passwords and PIN numbers are also more likely to better protect these sensitive pieces

of data than are people who believe that crooks “have no reason to want” their data.

Use Security Software

All computer devices (laptops, phones, tablets, and so on) that house sensitive information or that will be attached to networks with other devices do need security software. Several popular, inexpensive packages include antivirus, firewall, antispam, and other beneficial technologies.

Portable devices should have remote wipe capabilities and software optimized for mobile systems; remember to enable such features as soon as you get the device. Many phones come with security software preinstalled by providers — make sure you enable and use it. (For more details on securing mobile devices, see [Chapter 5](#).)

Encrypt Sensitive Information

Store all sensitive data in an encrypted format. If you have doubts as to whether something is sensitive enough to warrant encryption, it probably does, so err on the side of caution and encrypt.

Encryption is built in to many versions of Windows, and plenty of free encryption tools are available as well. It is amazing how much sensitive data that has been compromised could have remained secure if the parties from which it was stolen had used free encryption tools.

Also, never transmit sensitive information unless it is encrypted. Never enter sensitive information to any website if the site is not using SSL/TLS encryption, as evidenced by the page loading with HTTPS, and not HTTP, a difference easily seen by looking at the URL line of a web browser.

Encryption involves complex mathematical algorithms, but you don’t need to know any of the details in order to utilize and benefit from encryption.

One point that you should be aware of, however, is that two major families of encryption algorithms are used today:

- » **Symmetric:** You use the same secret key to encrypt and decrypt.
- » **Asymmetric:** You use one secret key to encrypt and another to decrypt.

Most simple encryption tools utilize symmetric encryption, and all you need to remember is a password to decrypt your data. Throughout the course of your professional career, however, you may encounter various asymmetric systems that require you to establish both a public key and a private key. The public key is shared with the world, and the private key is kept secret. Asymmetric encryption helps with sending data:

- » If you want to send information to John so that only John can read it, encrypt the data with John's public key so that only John can read it, because he is the only party who has John's private key.
- » If you want to send information to John and want John to know that you sent it, encrypt the data with your own private key and therefore, John will decrypt it with your public key and know that you sent it because only you have the private key that goes along with your public key.
- » If you want to send information to John in a format that only John can read and in a format that John will know that you sent it, encrypt with both your own private key and John's public keys.

In reality, because asymmetric is processor intensive, it is rarely used for encrypting entire conversations, but, rather it is utilized to encrypt special *session keys* —that is, to convey to the parties to a conversation the keys that they need for symmetric encryption. Additional discussions regarding asymmetric encryption are beyond the scope of this book.

Back Up Often

Back up often enough that if something goes wrong, you won't panic about how much data you lost because your last backup was days ago.



TIP Here is the general rule: If you're not sure whether you're backing up often enough, you probably aren't. No matter how convenient doing so may seem, do not keep your backups attached to your computer or even to your computer network (see [Chapter 13](#)). If you do keep backups attached in such a fashion, you run a serious risk that if ransomware or other malware somehow manages to infect your network, it can corrupt the backups as well, which would undermine the reason for backing up in the first place!

Ideally, have both backups stored both onsite and offsite. Onsite storage lets you restore quickly. Offsite storage helps ensure that backups are available even when a site becomes inaccessible or something else devastates all the computer equipment and digital data at a particular site.

One more thing: Make sure that you regularly test that your backups actually work. Backing up is worthless if you can't actually restore from your backups.

Do Not Share Passwords and Other Login Credentials

Every person accessing an important system should have his or her own login credentials. Do not share passwords for online banking, email, social media, and so on with your children or significant other — get everyone his or her own login.



REMEMBER Implementing such a scheme not only improves the ability to track down the source of problems if they occur, but, perhaps more importantly in the case of families, creates a much greater sense of responsibility and encourages people to better protect their passwords.

Use Proper Authentication

You have likely heard the conventional wisdom to use complex passwords for all systems, but do not overdo it. If using too many complex passwords is causing you to reuse passwords on multiple sensitive systems or to write down passwords in insecure locations, consider other strategies for forming your passwords, such as combining words, numbers, and proper names, such as custard4tennis6Steinberg. See [Chapter 7](#) for more details.

For extremely sensitive systems, if stronger forms of authentication, such as multifactor authentication, are available, take advantage of the offerings and use them.

For systems to which passwords do not really matter, consider using weak, easy-to-remember passwords. Don't waste brainpower where it does not need to be used.

Alternatively, use a password manager — but, not for your most sensitive passwords because you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket.

Use Social Media Wisely

Oversharing on social media posts has caused, and continues to cause, many problems, such as leaking sensitive information, violating compliance rules, and assisting criminals to carry out both cyber and physical attacks.

Be sure that your phone does not autocorrect anything to sensitive material when posting and don't accidentally cut and paste anything sensitive into a social media window.

Segregate Internet Access

Nearly all modern Wi-Fi routers allow you to run two or more networks — use this feature. If you work from home, for example, consider connecting your laptop to the Internet via a different Wi-Fi network than the one that your children use to browse the web and play video games. As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), look for the Guest feature in your router's configuration pages — that is where you will typically find the ability to set up the second network (often referred to as the Guest network).

Use Public Wi-Fi Safely

While public Wi-Fi is a great convenience that most people utilize regularly, it also creates serious cybersecurity risks. Because of the benefits that public Wi-Fi provides, however, cybersecurity practitioners who preach that people should refrain from using public Wi-Fi are about as likely to succeed in their effort as they would be if they instructed people to abandon insecure computers and revert back to using typewriters.

As such, it is important that you learn how to use public Wi-Fi safely and understand multiple techniques for improving your odds of defending yourself against mischievous parties (see [Chapter 6](#)).

Hire a Pro

Especially if you're starting or running a small business, getting expert advice can be a wise investment. An information-security professional can assist you in designing and implementing your approach to cybersecurity. The minimal cost of a small amount of professional help may pay for itself many times over in terms of time, money, and aggravation saved down the road.



REMEMBER The folks who will attack you — cybercriminals and other hackers — have, and utilize, technical expertise. If you'd hire a lawyer if you were charged with a crime, go to a doctor if you felt a virus coming on, or hire an accountant if you were audited by the IRS, hire a cyberpro.

Chapter 19

Ten Lessons from Major Cybersecurity Breaches

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking at the Marriott breach disclosed in 2018
 - » Understanding the Target breach
 - » Gaining knowledge from other breaches
-

Learning from the experiences of others can save people from unnecessary pain and suffering. In this chapter, I discuss five breaches that teach ten lessons. I specifically chose these five because they directly impacted either myself or a member of my family and, due to the breaches' respective magnitudes, are likely to have impacted you and yours as well.

Marriott

In November 2018, Marriott International disclosed that hackers had breached systems belonging to the Starwood hotel chain as far back as 2014 and had remained in the systems until September 2018 — about two years after Marriott acquired Starwood.

At the time of the disclosure, Marriott estimated that the breach may have impacted as many as 500 million customers and that the data compromised ranged from just the name and contact information for some customers to far more detailed data (including passport numbers, travel data, frequent traveler numbers, and so on) for others. Marriott also estimated that 100 million people's credit card numbers — along with expiration dates, but without CVC codes — were compromised, but that data was in an encrypted database, and Marriott saw no clear

indication that the hackers who had obtained the data were able to decrypt it.

Evidence suggests that the attack against Marriott was carried out by a Chinese group affiliated with the Chinese government and was launched in an effort to gather data on U.S. citizens. If such an attribution is correct, the Marriott breach would likely be the largest known breach to date by a nation-state funded organization of personal, civilian data.

In July 2019, the Information Commissioner's Office of the United Kingdom (ICO) announced that it intended to impose a fine of the equivalent of \$123 million on Marriott as a penalty for the failure to properly protect consumer data as mandated by the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). (See [Chapter 9](#) for more on GDPR.) According to an SEC filing by Marriott, the firm intends to appeal the penalty once the fine is formally filed, which had not happened at the time of writing.

While many lessons can be learned from the Marriott incident, two stand out:

- » **When anyone acquires a company and its information infrastructure, a thorough cybersecurity audit needs performed.**
Vulnerabilities or active hackers within the acquired firm can become a headache to the new owner, and government regulators may even seek to hold the acquiring company responsible for the failures of a firm that it acquires.

As the UK's Information Commissioner, Elizabeth Denham, put it: “The GDPR makes it clear that organisations must be accountable for the personal data they hold. This can include carrying out proper due diligence when making a corporate acquisition, and putting in place proper accountability measures to assess not only what personal data has been acquired, but also how it is protected.”



REMEMBER Don't rely on acquired companies to disclose cybersecurity problems; they may not be aware of potentially serious issues.

- » **From an intelligence perspective, foreign governments — especially those engaged in competition with the United States and other Western powers — value data about civilians.** Such governments may seek to find and use information to blackmail folks into spying, look for people with financial pressure who may be amenable to accepting money in exchange for illegal services, and so on.

Target

In December 2013, the giant retail chain Target disclosed that hackers had breached its systems and compromised about 40 million payment card numbers (a combination of credit and debit card numbers). Over the next few weeks, Target revised that figure. Altogether, the breach may have impacted as many as 110 million Target customers, and the information accessed may have included not only payment card information, but other personally identifiable information (such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses) as well.

Hackers entered Target by exploiting a vulnerability in a system used by a third-party HVAC contracting company that was servicing Target, and that had access to the retail company's point-of-sale systems.

As a result of the breach, Target's CEO and CIO both resigned, and the company estimated that the breach inflicted about \$162 million of damage to the firm.

Two lessons from the Target incident stand out:

- » **Management will be held responsible when companies suffer cyberattacks.** Personal careers can be harmed.
- » **A person or organization is only as cybersecure as the most vulnerable party having access to its systems.** Like a weak link in a strong chain, an inadequately secured third party with access to one's systems can easily undermine millions of dollars in cybersecurity investment. Home users should consider the moral of the Target story when allowing outsiders to use their home

computers or networks. You may be careful with your personal cyberhygiene, but if you allow someone who is not careful to join your network, malware on his or her device can potentially propagate to your machines as well.

Sony Pictures

In November 2014, a hacker leaked confidential data stolen from the Sony Pictures film studio, including copies of as-of-yet-unreleased Sony films, internal emails between employees, employees' compensation information, and various other personal information about employees and their families. The hacker also wiped many computers within Sony's information infrastructure.

The leak and wiping occurred after hackers had been stealing data from Sony for as long as a year — potentially taking as much as 100 terabytes of material; Sony's executives also apparently dismissed as spam various demands that the hackers had communicated via email. Sony's cybersecurity plan, procedures, and countermeasures either did not detect the large volume of data being transferred out, or took grossly insufficient action upon detection.

After the breach, a party claiming to be the hackers threatened to carry out physical terrorist attacks against theaters showing Sony's then-upcoming film, *The Interview*, a comedy about a plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. With the attackers' credibility and capabilities clearly asserted via the breach, cinema operators took the threat seriously, and many major American movie theater chains stated that they would not show *The Interview*. As a result, Sony canceled the film's formal premiere and theatrical release, instead offering the film only as a downloadable digital release followed by limited theatrical viewings.

While some cybersecurity experts were at least initially skeptical about the attribution, the United States government blamed North Korea for the hack and subsequent threats and, in September 2018, brought formal charges against a North Korean citizen that it claimed was involved with

carrying out the hack while working for the North Korean equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Here are two lessons that stand out:

- » Depending on what technology Sony actually had in place, this breach either shows the need for implementing data loss prevention technology or shows that cybersecurity technology can be terribly ineffective, if not utilized properly.
- » Nation-states may use cyberattacks as a weapon against businesses and individuals whom they view as harmful to their goals, interests, and aspirations.

Office of Personnel Management

In June 2015, the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which manages personnel processes and records for the U.S. federal government, announced that it had been the victim of a data breach. While the office initially estimated that far fewer records were compromised, the eventual estimate of the number of stolen records was more than 20 million.

The stolen records included personally identifiable information, including Social Security numbers, home addresses, dates and places of birth, and so on, of both current and former government employees, as well as of people who had undergone background checks, but who were never employed by the government. While the government initially believed that the contents of sensitive SF-86 forms — which contain all sorts of information used in background checks for security clearances — were not compromised, it ultimately disclosed that such data may have been accessed and stolen, meaning that the attackers may have obtained a treasure trove of private information about people with all sorts of security clearances.

The OPM breach is believed to actually be a combination of more than one breach — one likely began around 2012 and was detected in March

2014 and another began in May 2014 and was not detected until April 2015.

Many lessons can be learned from the OPM incident, but two stand out:

- » **Government organizations are not immune to serious breaches** — and even after being breached once, may still remain vulnerable to subsequent breaches. Furthermore, like their civilian counterparts, they may not detect breaches for quite some time and may initially underestimate the impact of a particular breach or series of breaches.
- » **Breaches at an organization can impact people whose connections with the organization have long since ended** — some folks may not even remember why the organization had their data. The OPM breach impacted people who had not worked at the government in decades or who had applied for clearances many years prior, but who never ended up working for the government.

Anthem

In February 2015, Anthem, the second-largest health insurer in the United States, disclosed that it had been the victim of a cyberattack that had compromised personal information of almost 80 million current and former customers. Data that was stolen included names, addresses, Social Security numbers, dates of birth, and employment histories. Medical data was not believed to have been pilfered, but the stolen data was sufficient to create serious risks of identity theft for many people.

The breach — likely the largest in the history of the American healthcare industry — was believed to have initially taken place sometime in 2014, when one worker at a subsidiary of the insurer clicked on a link in a phishing email.

Two lessons stand out:

- » **The healthcare industry is increasingly being targeted.** (This is also apparent from the tremendous number of ransomware attacks directed at hospitals in recent years, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#).)

» While people often imagine that breaches of major corporations require sophisticated James Bond-like techniques, the reality is that many, if not most, serious breaches are actually achieved using simple, classic techniques. Phishing still works wonders for criminals. Human mistakes are almost always an integral element of a serious breach.

Chapter 20

Ten Ways to Safely Use Public Wi-Fi

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Using public Wi-Fi appropriately
 - » Protecting yourself when using public Wi-Fi
-

You may not realize that you can do a few things to protect yourself while using public Wi-Fi. In this chapter, you discover ten ways to keep your devices safe while accessing Wi-Fi in public.

Use Your Cellphone as a Mobile Hotspot

If you have an unlimited cellular data plan, you can avoid the risks of public Wi-Fi by transforming your cellphone into a mobile hotspot and connecting your laptop and any other devices that lack cellular data service to your cellphone, rather than to public Wi-Fi.

Turn Off Wi-Fi Connectivity When You're Not Using Wi-Fi

Turning off Wi-Fi connectivity will prevent your device from (without notifying you) connecting to a network with the same name as one you have previously connected to. Criminals can, and have, set up Wi-Fi access points with names similar to popular public Wi-Fi networks, in an effort to lure people into connecting to poisoned networks that route

their victims to phony sites or distribute malware to connected devices. As an added bonus, turning off Wi-Fi will also conserve battery power.

Don't Perform Sensitive Tasks over Public Wi-Fi

Do not bank online, shop online, or access medical records online while using a public Wi-Fi connection.

Don't Reset Passwords When Using Public Wi-Fi

You should avoid resetting any passwords over public Wi-Fi. In fact, you should refrain from resetting any passwords while in a public location, regardless of whether or not you're using public Wi-Fi.

Use a VPN Service

If you can't use a cellular connection and must use the public Wi-Fi connection for a sensitive task despite the recommendation not to do so, at least consider using a VPN service, which adds multiple security benefits. Many popular VPN services are available today.

There is a tradeoff to using a VPN service, however. You may notice that your communications are slightly slower or suffer from greater latency than without the VPN running.

Use Tor

If you don't want your browsing history to be tracked by anyone, consider browsing using Tor (see [Chapter 4](#)), which bounces your communications through many servers and makes tracking exceedingly

difficult. There are even Tor browsers for smartphones. Like a VPN, Tor may slow down your communications.

Use Encryption

Use HTTPS instead of HTTP for all web pages that offer it, to prevent other users on the network from seeing the content of your communications.

Turn Off Sharing

If you're using a computer or device that shares any of its resources, turn off any and all shares before connecting to the public Wi-Fi. If you're unsure if your device shares resources, check it. Don't assume that it does not.

Have Information Security Software on Any Devices Connected to Public Wi-Fi Networks

For computers security packages must include, at a minimum, antivirus and personal firewall capabilities. For smartphones and tablets, use an app designed specifically to secure such devices. And, of course, make sure that the security software is up to date before connecting to public Wi-Fi.

Understand the Difference between True Public Wi-Fi and Shared Wi-Fi

Not all public Wi-Fi is equally risky. There is usually a much lower risk of being misrouted to phony sites or of malware being delivered to your device if you use the password-protected Guest network at a client site,

for example, than if you use unprotected free Wi-Fi offered by a public library. That does not mean that you should fully trust the network; other guests at the site still pose risks.

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About the Author

Joseph Steinberg advises businesses in the cybersecurity and emerging technologies sectors, helping them grow and succeed. He also serves as an expert witness and consultant on related matters.

Joseph previously led businesses and divisions within the information-security industry for more than two decades, has been calculated to be one of the top three cybersecurity influencers worldwide, and has written books ranging from *Cybersecurity For Dummies* to the official study guide from which many Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) study for their certification exams. He is also one of only 28 people worldwide to hold the suite of advanced information security certifications(CISSP, ISSAP, ISSMP, and CSSLP), indicating that he possesses a rare, robust knowledge of information security that is both broad and deep; his information-security-related inventions are cited in more than 400 U.S. patent filings.

Joseph is also one of the best read columnists in the cybersecurity field and a respected authority on other emerging technologies, having amassed millions of readers as a regular columnist for *Forbes* and *Inc.* magazines. Within three months of going independent in April 2018, his column — now published exclusively on JosephSteinberg.com — reached 1 million monthly views. His writing reflects his passion for exploring the impact of emerging technologies on human society, making complex technical concepts simple to understand and helping people focus on the technology issues and cybersecurity risks that truly impact them.

Joseph can be reached at <https://JosephSteinberg.com>.

Dedication

Many summers ago, when I was 8 years old, my parents arranged for me to take a programming class, giving me my first exposure to the then-emerging world of personal computers. Unbeknownst to any of us at the time, the moment at which I wrote my first line of code by typing on the chicklet keyboard of the school's Commodore PET marked the start of what would become my lifelong fascination with computer technology. That childhood interest ultimately blossomed from a hobby into a college major, a graduate course of study, and a career.

On that note, as I stand in my office looking at the almost four-decades-old cassette tape containing software that I wrote that summer, I dedicate this book to my parents, Dr. Edward and Sandra Steinberg.

Also, as my youngest daughter, Tammy, was not yet born when I dedicated a prior book to my wife and children, I also dedicate this work to her, the first digital native born into our family.

Author's Acknowledgments

Cybersecurity is of paramount importance in today’s world, but few modern-day adults learned from their parents or in school about mitigating against today’s major cybersecurity risks. Couple that lack of formal education with the combination of information overload, the proliferation of oft-repeated impractical advice, technical terms, and the constant barrage of news stories about cyberattacks and breaches, and it is no surprise that, when it comes to cybersecurity, many folks feel confused, fatigued, and scared.

As a result, there has never been a greater need for a book that brings basic, practical cybersecurity knowledge to “nontechnical people” than there is today.

It was with the aim of satisfying that need in mind that Wiley approached me about writing this book, and it was the importance of delivering on such a goal that led me to accept the opportunity. As such, I would like to thank Ashley Coffey and the team at Wiley for both agreeing to provide the public with a resource that it so desperately needs, and for giving me the opportunity to collaborate with them on this important effort.

I would also like to thank my editor, Kelly Ewing, and my technical reviewer, Daniel Smith, whose input and guidance helped improve the book that you are now holding, optimized it for readability, and ensured that it delivers to you its maximum informational value.

Thank you also to my wife, Shira, and to my daughters, Penina, Mimi, and Tammy, for their support and encouragement throughout the time-intensive process of developing and writing this work.

And, finally, while there were no cybersecurity classes when I went to school, several great professors helped me hone my understanding of the building blocks of computer science that I ultimately assembled and applied in order to develop expertise in my field. I wish to single out and specifically recognize two of my instructors, Matthew Smosna and Aizik

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