

You hear about hackers in the news more and more these days but it doesn't become real until they strike close to home. Recently, a local computer company had their web servers compromised by hackers and that resulted in many of their clients websites being temporarily taken off line. The hackers even went so far as to put notes where the website should be, claiming credit for the hack. As the day went on and people went to these sites, we started getting calls. People wanted to know if their business might be at risk and how they could stop that from happening. So, we thought it might be a good time to explain a little about what hacking is and who might be at risk.

The term Hacker has come to mean a person gaining illegal entry into a computer or network for the purpose of stealing or corrupting data. There are actually various types of hacker who are doing it for many different reasons both good and bad.

Hackers fall into four main categories which I will call **Thief**, **Fame**, **Defacer**, **Vigilante**.

- The **Thief** type hacker is in it for the money. They are the most dangerous type of hacker because they are actively taking data to resell later like Social Security Numbers, Credit Card Numbers, Bank Codes, Contact lists, Client lists, Industrial secrets or even identities. This group is the main force behind Viruses and malware which they use to turn home computers into “Zombies” which they can then hide behind and use to penetrate other networks.
- The **Defacer** is the juvenile delinquent of the group, it is usually a younger crowd but can be just as harmful as the **Thief**. This group will hack into websites and networks in order to change the pages so that they have social or political commentary, erotica or just rewrite and delete documents. They are the graffiti artists of the Net.
- The **Fame** type can include traits from the above two types once they are into a system but they are mainly out for the challenge. They are usually an older and highly skilled group of people that are always on the lookout for a system to hack that will show the world that they are the best. Since they are so selective about their targets they are not as dangerous to home users because home users have nothing they want.
- The **Vigilante** is a “good hacker”. They hack into systems to see what flaws the security may have. Then they generally contact the company responsible and tell them about the hole in their defenses and give them a time limit to correct the problems. If the time limit expires and the company has still not fixed the issues they will exploit them to gain entrance to the system and do various things to punish the company for not listening to them.

Now that you have a good idea of what hacking is, we wanted to give you some basic advice on protecting against it.

The following will help to protect your network:

- Regularly reset your passwords and implement password policies which require long, complex passwords. Got to this address <http://www.securitystats.com/tools/password.php> if you want to test the strength of your password.

- Allow access to your computer systems only to authorized contractors and employees. Remove access immediately if the user's status changes.
- Secure your wireless connection! Don't use the default settings that your wireless equipment come with. Change your SSID wireless name and encrypt it by using either WPA, WEP, or MAC address filtering.
- Patch those operating system security holes! When using Windows, it is as simple as running Windows Updates every couple of weeks to ensure that you install the most recent critical updates from Microsoft's website.
- Block access to your computer at its source! Most security risks come from the Internet, so use a firewall to protect yourself from Internet threats. If you're a home user, you should be secure by using a software-based firewall, but a business should rely more on a hardware firewall for added protection and functionality.
- Keep an up-to-date anti-virus and anti-malware solution installed on all of your computers and run scheduled scans on all of your systems.

If you're unsure about your computer and network security, feel free to give us a call. We would be glad to help!

Further reading on the subject:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_\(computer_security\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_(computer_security))

<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/H/hacker.html>

<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/C/crack.html>

<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/D/defacement.html>