Social engineering methods pdf

I'm not robot!

Social engineering is the term used for a broad range of malicious activities accomplished through human interactions. It uses psychological manipulation to trick users into making security mistakes or giving away sensitive information. Social engineering attacks happen in one or more steps. A perpetrator first investigates the intended victim to gather necessary background information, such as potential points of entry and weak security protocols, needed to proceed with the attack. Then, the attacker moves to gain the victim's trust and provide stimuli for subsequent actions that break security practices, such as revealing sensitive information or granting access to critical resources. Social Engineering Attack Lifecycle What makes social engineering especially dangerous is that it relies on human error, rather than vulnerabilities in software and operating systems. Mistakes made by legitimate users are much less predictable, making them harder to identify and thwart than a malware-based intrusion. Social engineering attack techniques Social engineering attacks come in many different forms and can be performed anywhere where human interaction is involved. The following are the five most common forms of digital social engineering assaults. Baiting As its name implies, baiting attacks use a false promise to pique a victim's greed or curiosity. They lure users into a trap that steals their personal information or inflicts their systems with malware. The most reviled form of baiting uses physical media to disperse malware. For example, attackers leave the bait—typically malware-infected flash drives—in conspicuous areas where potential victims are certain to see them (e.g., bathrooms, elevators, the parking lot of a targeted company). The bait has an authentic look to it, such as a label presenting it as the company's payroll list. Victims pick up the bait out of curiosity and insert it into a work or home computer, resulting in automatic malware installation on the system. Baiting scams don't necessarily have to be carried out in the physical world. Online forms of baiting consist of enticing ads that lead to malicious sites or that encourage users to download a malware-infected application. Scareware Scareware involves victims being bombarded with false alarms and fictitious threats. Users are deceived to think their system is infected with malware, prompting them to install software that has no real benefit (other than for the perpetrator) or is malware itself. Scareware is also referred to as deception software, rogue scanner software and fraudware. A common scareware example is the legitimate-looking popup banners appearing in your browser while surfing the web, displaying such text such as, "Your computer may be infected with harmful spyware programs." It either offers to install the tool (often malware-infected) for you, or will direct you to a malicious site where your computer becomes infected. Scareware is also distributed via spam email that doles out bogus warnings, or makes offers for users to buy worthless/harmful services. Pretexting Here an attacker obtains information through a series of cleverly crafted lies. The scam is often initiated by a perpetrator pretending to need sensitive information from a victim so as to perform a critical task. The attacker usually starts by establishing trust with their victim by impersonating co-workers, police, bank and tax officials, or other persons who have right-to-know authority. The pretexter asks questions that are ostensibly required to confirm the victim's identity, through which they gather important personal data. All sorts of pertinent information and records is gathered using this scam, such as social security numbers, personal addresses and phone numbers, phone records, staff vacation dates, bank records and even security information related to a physical plant. Phishing As one of the most popular social engineering attack types, phishing scams are email and text message campaigns aimed at creating a sense of urgency, curiosity or fear in victims. It then prods them into revealing sensitive information, clicking on links to malicious websites, or opening attachments that contain malware. An example is an email sent to users of an online service that alerts them of a policy violation requiring immediate action on their part, such as a required password change. It includes a link to an illegitimate website—nearly identical in appearance to its legitimate version—prompting the unsuspecting user to enter their current credentials and new password. Upon form submittal the information is sent to the attacker. Given that identical, or near-identical, messages are sent to all users in phishing campaigns, detecting and blocking them are much easier for mail servers having access to threat sharing platforms. Spear phishing This is a more targeted version of the phishing scam whereby an attacker chooses specific individuals or enterprises. They then tailor their messages based on characteristics, job positions, and contacts belonging to their victims to make their attack less conspicuous. Spear phishing requires much more effort on behalf of the perpetrator and may take weeks and months to pull off. They're much harder to detect and have better success rates if done skillfully. A spear phishing scenario might involve an attacker who, in impersonating an organization's IT consultant, sends an email to one or more employees. It's worded and signed exactly as the consultant normally does, thereby deceiving recipients into thinking it's an authentic message. The message prompts recipients to change their password and provides them with a link that redirects them to a malicious page where the attacker now captures their credentials. See how Imperva Web Application Firewall can help you with social engineering attacks. Social engineering prevention Social engineers manipulate human feelings, such as curiosity or fear, to carry out schemes and draw victims into their traps. Therefore, be wary whenever you feel alarmed by an email, attracted to an offer displayed on a website, or when you come across stray digital media lying about. Being alert can help you protect yourself against most social engineering attacks taking place in the digital realm. Moreover, the following tips can help improve your vigilance in relation to social engineering hacks. Don't open emails and attachments from suspicious sources – If you don't know the sender in question, you don't need to answer an email. Even if you do know them and are suspicious about their message, cross-check and confirm the news from other sources, such as via telephone or directly from a service provider's site. Remember that email addresses are spoofed all of the time; even an email purportedly coming from a trusted source may have actually been initiated by an attacker. Use multifactor authentication – One of the most valuable pieces of information attackers seek are user credentials. Using multifactor authentication helps ensure your account's protection in the event of system compromise. Imperva Login Protect is an easy-to-deploy 2FA solution that can increase account security for your applications. Be wary of tempting offers – If an offer sounds too enticing, think twice before accepting it as fact. Googling the topic can help you quickly determine whether you're dealing with a legitimate offer or a trap. Keep your antivirus/antimalware software updated – Make sure automatic updates are engaged, or make it a habit to download the latest signatures first thing each day. Periodically check to make sure that the updates have been applied, and scan your system for possible infections. Most cybercriminals are master manipulators, but that doesn't mean they're all manipulators of technology — some cybercriminals favor the art of human manipulation. In other words, they favor social engineering, meaning exploiting human errors and behaviors to conduct a cyberattack. For a simple social engineering example, this could occur in the event a cybercriminal impersonates an IT professional and requests your login information to patch up a security flaw on your device. If you provide the information, you've just handed a malicious individual the keys to your account and they didn't even have to go to the trouble of hacking your email or computer to do it. As with most cyber threats, social engineering can come in many forms and they're ever-evolving. Here, we're overviewing what social engineering looks like today, attack types to know, and red flags to watch for so you don't become a victim. For a social engineering definition, it's the art of manipulating someone to divulge sensitive or confidential information, usually through digital communication, that can be used for fraudulent purposes. Unlike traditional cyberattacks that rely on security vulnerabilities to gain access to unauthorized devices or networks, social engineering techniques target human vulnerabilities. For this reason, it's also considered human hacking. Cybercriminals who conduct social engineering attacks are called social engineers, and they're usually operating with two goals in mind: to wreak havoc and/or obtain valuables like important information or money. How social engineering works Like most types of manipulation, social engineering is built on trust first— false trust, that is — and persuasion second. Generally, there are four steps to a successful social engineering attack: Preparation: The social engineer gathers information about their victims, including where they can access them, such as on social media, email, text message, etc. Infiltration: The social engineer approaches their victims, usually impersonating a trustworthy source and using the information gathered about the victim to validate themselves. Exploitation: The social engineer uses persuasion to request information from their victim, such as account logins, payment methods, contact information, etc., that they can use to commit their cyberattack. Disengagement: The social engineer stops communication with their victim, commits their attack, and swiftly departs. Depending on the social engineering attack type, these steps could span a matter of hours to a matter of months. No matter the time frame, knowing the signs of a social engineering attack can help you spot — and stop — one fast. Signs of a social engineering attack Social engineering can happen everywhere, online and offline. And unlike traditional cyberattacks, whereby cybercriminals are stealthy and want to go unnoticed, social engineers are often communicating with us in plain sight. Consider these common social engineering tactics that one might be right under your nose. Your "friend" sends you a strange message Social engineers can pose as trusted individuals in your life, including a friend, boss, coworker, even a banking institution, and send you conspicuous messages containing malicious links or downloads. Just remember, you know your friends best — and if they send you something unusual, ask them about it. Your emotions are heightened The more irritable we are, the more likely we are to put our guard down. Social engineers are great at stirring up our emotions like fear, excitement, curiosity, anger, guilt, or sadness. In your online interactions, consider the cause of these emotional triggers before acting on them. The request is urgent Social engineers don't want you to think twice about their tactics. That's why many social engineering attacks involve some type of urgency, such as a sweepstake you have to enter now or a cybersecurity software you need to download to wipe a virus off of your computer. The offer feels too good to be true Ever receive news that you didn't ask for? Even good news like, say winning the lottery or a free cruise? Chances are that if the offer seems too good to be true, it's just that — and potentially a social engineering attack. You're receiving help you didn't ask for Social engineers might reach out under the guise of a company providing help for a problem you have, similar to a tech support scam. And considering you might not be an expert in their line of work, you might believe they're who they say they are and provide them access to your device or accounts. The sender can't prove their identity If you raise any suspicions with a potential social engineer and they're unable to prove their identity — perhaps they won't do a video call with you, for instance — chances are they're not to be trusted. 10 social engineering attack types + examples Almost all cyberattacks have some form of social engineering involved. And most social engineering techniques also involve malware, meaning malicious software that unknowingly wreaks havoc on our devices and potentially monitors our activity. Pore over these common forms of social engineering, some involving malware, as well as real-world examples and scenarios for further context. 1. Scareware As the name indicates, scareware is malware that's meant to scare you to take action — and take action fast. It often comes in the form of pop-ups or emails indicating you need to "act now" to get rid of viruses or malware on your device. In fact, if you act you might be downloading a computer virus or malware. Scareware example Turns out it's not only single-acting cybercriminals who leverage scareware. In 2019, an office supplier and tech support company teamed up to commit scareware acts. The office supplier required its employees to run a rigged PC test on customers' devices that would encourage customers to purchase unneeded repair services. Ultimately, the Federal Trade Commission ordered the supplier and tech support company to pay a $35 million settlement. 2. Email hacking and contact spamming It's in our nature to pay attention to messages from people we know. And social engineers know this all too well, commandeering email accounts and spamming contact lists with phishing scams and messages. Email hacking and contact spamming example If your friend sent you an email with the subject, "Check out this site I found, it's totally cool," you might not think twice before opening it. By taking over someone's email account, a social engineer can make those on the contact list believe they're receiving emails from someone they know. The primary objectives include spreading malware and tricking people out of their personal data. 3. Access tailgating Also known as piggybacking, access tailgating is when a social engineer physically trails or follows an authorized individual into an area they do not have access to. This can be as simple of an act as holding a door open for someone else. Once inside, they have full reign to access devices containing important information. Access tailgating example If someone is trailing behind you with their hands full of heavy boxes, you'd hold the door for them, right? In reality, you might have a social engineer on your hands. Your act of kindness is granting them access to an unrestricted area where they can potentially tap into private devices and networks. 4. Phishing Phishing is a well-known way to grab information from an unwitting victim. How it typically works: A cybercriminal, or phisher, sends a message to a target that's an ask for some type of information or action that might help with a more significant crime. The ask can be as simple as encouraging you to download an attachment or verifying your mailing address. Worth noting is there are many forms of phishing that social engineers choose from, all with different means of targeting. Spam phishing often takes the form of one big email sweep, not necessarily targeting a single user. Spear phishing targets individual users, perhaps by impersonating a trusted contact. Whaling targets celebrities or high-level executives. Phishing also comes in a few different delivery forms: Vishing, meaning voice phishing, is when your phone call might be recorded, including information you input on PIN pads. Smishing, meaning SMS phishing, are texts containing malicious links. Email phishing is among the most traditional phishing method, meaning phishing by email oftentimes by delivering a malicious link or a download. Angler phishing is when a cybercriminal impersonates a customer service person to intercept your communications and private messages. URL phishing is a falsified link you receive that contains malware. In-session phishing occurs when you're already on a platform or account and are asked, for instance, to log in again. Fax-based phishing often occurs as a fake email from a trusted institution requested you print off the message and fax back your sensitive information. Phishing example A social engineer might pose as a banking institution, for instance, asking email recipients to click on a link to log in to their accounts. Those who click on the link, though, are taken to a fake website that, like the email, appears to be legitimate. If they log in at that fake site, they're essentially handing over their login credentials and giving the cybercriminal access to their bank accounts. 5. DNS spoofing Also known as cache poisoning, DNS spoofing is when a browser is manipulated so that online users are redirected to malicious websites bent on stealing sensitive information. In other words, DNS spoofing is when your cache is poisoned with these malicious redirects. DNS spoofing example In 2018, a cloud computing company and its customers were victims of a DNS spoofing attack that resulted in around $17 million of cryptocurrency being stolen from victims. Cybercriminals rerouted people trying to log into their cryptocurrency accounts to a fake website that gathered their credentials to the cryptocurrency site and ultimately drained their accounts. 6. Baiting Baiting is built on the premise of someone taking the bait, meaning dangling something desirable in front of a victim, and hoping they'll bite. This occurs most often on peer-to-peer sites like social media, whereby someone might encourage you to download a video or music, just to discover it's infected with malware — and now, so is your device. Baiting example For a physical example of baiting, a social engineer might leave a USB stick, loaded with malware, in a public place where targets will see it such as in a cafe or bathroom. In addition, the criminal might label the device in a compelling way — "confidential" or "bonuses." A target who takes the bait will pick up the device and plug it into a computer to see what's on it. The malware will then automatically inject itself into the computer. 7. Physical breaches As the name indicates, physical breaches are when a cybercriminal is in plain sight, physically posing as a legitimate source to steal confidential data or information from you. This might be as a colleague or an IT person — perhaps they're a disgruntled former employee — acting like they're helping you with a problem on your device. In fact, they could be stealing your account logins. Physical breaches example A social engineer posing as an IT person could be granted access into an office setting to update employees' devices — and they might actually do this. At the same time, however, they could be putting a keylogger on the devices to track employees ' every keystroke and patch together confidential information that can be used toward other cyberattacks. 8. Pretexting What is pretexting? It's the use of an interesting pretext, or ploy, to capture someone's attention. Once the story hooks the person, the social engineer tries to trick the would-be victim into providing something of value. Oftentimes, the social engineer is impersonating a legitimate source. Pretexting example Let's say you received an email, naming you as the beneficiary of a will or a house deed. The email requests your personal information to prove you're the actual beneficiary and to speed the transfer of your inheritance. Instead, you're at risk of giving a con artist the ability not to add to your bank account, but to access and withdraw your funds. 9. Watering hole attacks A watering hole attack is a one-sweep attack that infects a single webpage with malware. The webpage is almost always on a very popular site — or virtual watering hole, if you will — to ensure that the malware can reach as many victims as possible. Watering hold attack example In 2014, a media site was compromised with a watering hole attack attributed to Chinese cybercriminals. They exploited vulnerabilities on the media site to create a fake widget that, when loaded, infected visitors' browsers with malware. 10. Quid pro quo Quid pro quo means a favor for a favor, essentially "I give you this, and you give me that." In the instance of social engineering, the victim coughs up sensitive information like account logins or payment methods and then the social engineer doesn't return their end of the bargain. Quid pro quo example For a quid pro quo video gaming example, you might be on a gaming forum and on the lookout for a cheat code to surpass a difficult level. Perhaps you wire money to someone selling the code, just to never hear from them again and to never see your money again. 15 tips to avoid becoming a victim of a social engineering attack Your best defense against social engineering attacks is to educate yourself of their risks, red flags, and remedies. To that end, look to the following tips to stay alert and avoid becoming a victim of a social engineering attack. Communicate safely online Your own wits are your first defense against social engineering attacks. Simply slowing down and approaching almost all online interactions with skepticism can go a long way in stopping social engineering attacks in their tracks. 1. Don't click links you don't request. 2. Don't overshare personal information online. 3. Be cautious of online-only friendships. 4. Remember the signs of social engineering. 5. Acknowledge what's too good to be true. Secure your accounts and networks Beyond putting a guard up yourself, you're best to guard your accounts and networks against cyberattacks, too. Consider these means and methods to lock down the places that host your sensitive information. 6. Use two-factor authentication. 7. Only use strong, unique passwords and change them often. 8. Consider a password manager to keep track of your strong passwords. 9. Set high spam filters. 10. Don't allow strangers on your Wi-Fi network. 11. Use a virtual private network. 12. Monitor your account activity closely. Safeguard your devices Finally, ensuring your devices are up to cybersecurity snuff means that you aren't the only one charged with warding off social engineers — your devices are doing the same. 13. Don't leave devices unattended. 14. Use cybersecurity software. 15. Keep your software up to date Manipulation is a nasty tactic for someone to get what they want. Thankfully, it's not a sure-fire one when you know how to spot the signs of it. Now that you know what is social engineering — and the techniques associated with it — you'll know when to put your guard up higher, online and offline.

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