

You May be at Risk

In our first article on information security, we learned that information security involves the prevention and detection of unauthorized use of a computer or information system. We also learned about the three main goals of information security: confidentiality, integrity, and availability. Today, we will investigate risks to information security and ways to prevent these risks.

If you're like many people, you're probably wondering who, exactly, would really want to break into your computer, and why. After all, your home computer is much less enticing than, say, a bank's computer, right? This may be partially true, but unfortunately, hackers don't care about who you are. They want to gain access to your computer to use it to attack other computers or take your personal information to use against you or use to steal your identity.

Here's how a typical hacker operates: A hacker scans the Internet for an "open" computer, a computer with little to no protection on it (we refer to this as the "lowest hanging fruit"). He then breaks into the computer, and then uses it to attack other computers. Why? This way he can keep his whereabouts a secret. Sometimes a hacker actually breaks into several computers, and uses them all to attack one computer at the same time.

Even if your computer is connected to the Internet for only a short time, your computer may still be a target. Being online for even a short time gives intruders the chance to take enough information to steal your identity or cause damage to your or someone else's computer.

How easy is it for a hacker to break into your computer? Unfortunately, intruders are discovering new ways to gain access to your information every day. When holes in the system are discovered, however, computer vendors will often develop patches to address the problem. Even though they do this, it is up to you to obtain and install the patches, or correctly configure the software to operate more securely. Most incidents can be prevented if users would keep their computers up to date with patches and security fixes. Some software even has default settings that allow others to access your computer unless you change the settings, such as chat programs or web browsers.

The only way to make any information system more secure is to learn about the ways to make it so. Although this article only touches the surface of even the basic risks to information security, you will learn more about making your time online and your own information system safer and more secure in the articles that follow. Although no system is ever impossible to break into or free of risk, learning the ways to make your own information system more secure will help reduce the chances of anything harmful happening to your information.