



Phishing: Doing Your Part

Phishing attacks use email or malicious websites to infect your machine with malware and viruses in order to collect personal and financial information. Cybercriminals attempt to lure users into clicking on a link or opening an attachment which infects their computer, creating a vulnerability to attacks. Phishing emails may appear to come from a real financial institution, e-commerce site, government agency, or any other service, business, or individual. The email may also request personal information such as account numbers, passwords, or Social Security numbers. When users respond with the information or click on a link, attackers use it to access users' accounts.

How Criminals Lure You In

The following messages from the Federal Trade Commission's OnGuardOnline are examples of what attackers may email or text when phishing for sensitive information:

- "We suspect an unauthorized transaction on your account. To ensure that your account is not compromised, please click the link below, and confirm your identity."
- "During our regular verification of accounts, we couldn't identify your information. Please click here to update and verify your information."
- "Our record indicate that your account was overcharged. You must call us within 7 days to receive your refund."

To see these examples of actual phishing emails, and steps to take if you believe you received a phishing email, please visit:

<https://www.irs.gov/privacy-disclosure/report-phishing>

Simple Tips



Play "hard to get" with strangers. Links in emails and online posts are often the way cybercriminals compromise your computer. If you're unsure who an email is from — even if details appear accurate — do not respond, and do not click on any links or attachments found in the email. Be cautious of generic greetings such as "Hello Bank Customer", as these are often signs of phishing attempts. If you are concerned about the legitimacy of an email, call the company directly.



Think before you act. Be wary of communications that implore you to act immediately. Many phishing emails attempt to create a sense of urgency, causing the recipient to fear their account or information is in jeopardy. If you receive a suspicious email that appears to be from someone you know, reach out to that person directly on a separate secure platform. If the email comes from an organization but still looks "phishy", reach out to them via customer service to verify the communication.



Protect your personal information. If people contacting you have key details from your life — your job title, multiple email addresses, full name, and more that you may have published online somewhere — they can attempt a direct spear-phishing attack on you. Cybercriminals can also use social engineering with these details to try to manipulate you into skipping normal security protocols.



Be wary of hyperlinks. Avoid clicking on hyperlinks in emails and hover over links to verify authenticity. Also ensure that URLs begin with "https". The "s" indicates encryption is enabled to protect users' information.



Double your login protection. Enable multi-factor authentication (MFA) to ensure that the only person who has access to your account is you. Use it for email, banking, social media, and any other service which requires logging in. If MFA is an option, enable it using a trusted mobile device, such as a smartphone, an authenticator app, or secure token — small physical device that can hook onto your key ring.



Shake up your password protocol. According to NIST guidance, you should consider using the longest password or passphrase permissible. Get creative and customize your standard password for different sites, which can prevent cybercriminals from gaining access to these accounts and protect you in the event of a breach. Use password managers to generate and remember different, complex passwords for each of your accounts.



Install and update antivirus software. Make sure all of your computers, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, phones, and tablets, are equipped with regularly updated antivirus software, firewalls, email filters, and anti-spyware.



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Source: CISA National Cybersecurity Awareness
<https://www.cisa.gov/publication/national-cybersecurity-awareness-month-publications>



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