



801 Santa Clara Avenue, Suite C
Alameda, CA 94501
510.523.7312
www.mjswebsolutions.com
info@mjswebsolutions.com

Phishing and Spyware – Oh My!

The terms 'phishing' and 'spyware' may be new to you, but they're not new if you've been a victim of the latest rash of online security threats. In April, market researcher Gartner estimated that 57 million Americans had received phishing e-mail during the previous 12 months. Nearly 2 million took the bait and revealed personal information. Spy Audit, found 83.4 million instances of spyware from 3.2 million scans in the first nine months of this year. An average of 26 instances of spyware were found per scan.

What are these attacks, why you should be concerned and how to prevent yourself from being the next statistic?

Phishing

Phishing (not fishing) is the act of sending a deceptive email to look like an authentic email from a well established firm in an attempt to scam the user into surrendering private information that could be used in an identity theft.

You may have seen these emails: Some look like they're from Citibank or MasterCard. They're usually filled with spelling errors and request you to sign in to your account by asking for your Social Security Number, Credit Card number and/or PIN number.

Here are a few ways to protect yourself from these phishing scams.

1. Don't provide any of your personal information over the internet.
2. When in doubt, delete. Delete any email you have doubts about, especially one that requests you to give up your personal, private information.
3. If you feel the email looks suspicious, report the email to the 'real' company.

Spyware

Spyware is a program that gets downloaded onto your computer, usually without your knowledge, when visiting certain websites. Once downloaded, the program tracks your every move, whether it's accessing your personal files on your hard drive to recording your web surfing activity, and reports these findings back to the company that produced the spyware, thus subjecting you to identity theft.

The problem has gotten so bad federal and state governments are stepping in. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a California measure into law in September. But instead of waiting for the government, there are a few effective methods you can do right now to prevent yourself from being the next victim of a spyware attack.

1. Switch to an alternative browser. I recommend Mozilla's Firefox (www.mozilla.org/). Just by switching browsers, you can potentially eliminate all spyware.
2. To prevent it is to remove it. To remove spyware from your system, download both AdAware (www.lavasoftusa.com/) and Spybot (www.safer-networking.org/). Run these programs regularly to eliminate spyware on your computer.
3. Carefully read licensing agreements before you install new software. Stay away from peer-to-peer file-sharing networks and websites that offer pirated software or adult material.

Knowing is half the battle. Don't be the next statistic. Be aware and diligent in your fight against these scammers. You're the only one who cares more about your private information than anyone else.