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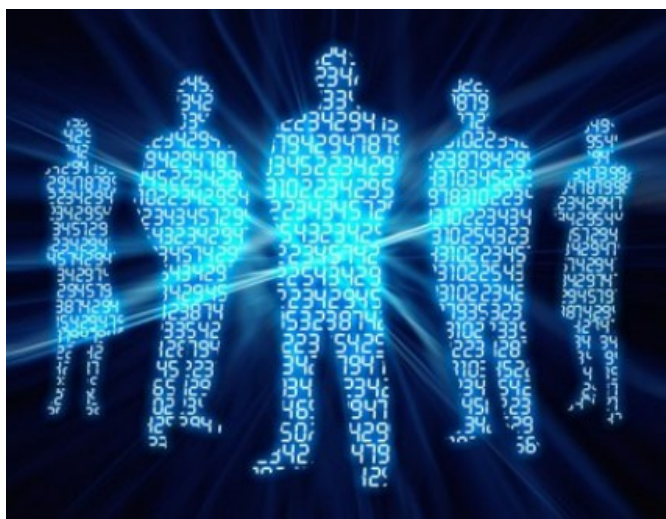
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[Contest finds workers at big firms handing data to hackers](#)

Posted on August 3, 2010 by [Staff](#)



LAS VEGAS—Hackers competing in a social engineering contest at the Defcon conference here on Friday were able to trick random employees at 10 major U.S. tech, oil, and retail companies into giving them sensitive information over the phone that could be used in targeted computer attacks on the companies.

“Every single company, if it was a security audit, would have failed,” Christopher Hadnagy, operations manager for Offensive Security, a training and penetration testing company, told CNET after the first day of the contest, which wraps up Saturday and targets BP, Shell, Google, PG&E, Microsoft, Apple, Cisco, Ford, Coke, and Pepsi. “Not one company shut us down, although certain employees within the company did. But we (participants) were able to call right back and get another employee that was more willing to comply.”

The organizers declined to offer specific comments about any one of the companies targeted by the contest or say which companies are faring better or worse than the others. But they said they’d release a report with aggregated information in a few weeks.

“The point isn’t to shame anyone. It’s to bring awareness to this attack vector, which is probably the easiest way to hack a corporation today,” said Mati Aharoni, lead trainer at Offensive Security. “We really don’t want to see anyone get harmed or get in trouble.”

Social engineering is a hacking technique that involves simply tricking people into offering up sensitive information, rather than using technical means—such as breaking into computer systems—to get such data. The contest’s organizers said companies put a lot of emphasis on buying security software and building technological defenses for their information, but they ignore their Achilles heel: the people who work for them.

“The human resources are the weakest and softest spot of the whole organization,” Aharoni said. “The most used [pinewswire.net/.../contest-finds-workers-...](#)

vector by hackers today is the easiest route, and that's usually the human element."

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