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Hi, You're About to Get Hacked



At a hacking convention in Las Vegas called Defcon, a contest revealed that big companies could easily be hacking targets.

Image: IStockphotos

A hacker contest in Las Vegas this weekend showed that despite the recent slew of high-profile hacking attacks, it is relatively easy to launch a cyber attack on a big company. Just chat up their employees a bit.

The competition to target U.S. companies—not to do harm, but to test their network security—took place Friday and Saturday at a conference hosted by Defcon, an organization of benevolent hackers that aims to promote research on security vulnerabilities in order to [pressure companies to fix](http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/06/13/fighting-off-hack-attacks/) them, [reports Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/07/us-cybersecurity-corporations-idUSTRE7762KX20110807).

In a system they called “social engineering,” the contestants actually spoke to employees at some of the largest U.S. companies, sometimes posing as I.T. employees, and used various tricks to get the staffers to reveal information that could be used in [planning cyber attacks](http://www.portfolio.com/views/blogs/the-tech-observer/2011/06/03/pbs-hacking-culprits-target-sony-pictures) against them.

The contestants were in some cases able to convince employees to use their corporate computers to browse websites that the hackers suggested. If they were [criminal hackers](http://www.portfolio.com/views/blogs/the-tech-observer/2011/08/03/cyberspying-report-says-tech-companies-were-among-victims), the websites would have likely loaded malicious software onto the workers’ PCs. One worker even agreed to give a contestant information on the configuration of her PC that would have allowed a real hacker to choose which type of

malware would work best.

Employees were also asked questions about how their company backs up and stores data, wireless network use, and the names of the companies that provide on-site security, copy paper and toner.

Software giant Oracle Corp. reportedly gave away the most information. Other targets included Apple, AT&T, Symantec Corp., Sysco Corp. and Verizon.

The takeaway for businesses: [Shore up your security efforts \(http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/06/13/fighting-off-hack-attacks/\)](http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/06/13/fighting-off-hack-attacks/), and make sure your employees know who they're talking to when it comes to anything I.T. related, or you could become the victim of a smooth-talking hacker who really does want to do harm.

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[\(http://www.portfolio.com/business-news/2011/08/08/moodys-explains-concern-as-standard-and-poors-decision-to-cut-united-states-debt-rating-has-worldwide-implications\)](http://www.portfolio.com/business-news/2011/08/08/moodys-explains-concern-as-standard-and-poors-decision-to-cut-united-states-debt-rating-has-worldwide-implications) Moody's this morning restated the possibility it could join Standard & Poor's in lowering its rating of U.S. debt. The S&P decision has already sparked concern and market reaction around the world.

[Standard & Poor's AA Club:](http://www.portfolio.com/slideshows/2011/08/countries-with-aa-rating-by-standard-and-poors) [\(http://www.portfolio.com/slideshows/2011/08/countries-with-aa-rating-by-standard-and-poors\)](http://www.portfolio.com/slideshows/2011/08/countries-with-aa-rating-by-standard-and-poors) The U.S. isn't the only country that has less than stellar credit. Here's a look at some of the others in the S&P group of nations who have a AA credit rating.

[Monkey Madness:](http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/08/05/monkey-madness-in-branding-tied-to-planet-of-the-apes) [\(http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/08/05/monkey-madness-in-branding-tied-to-planet-of-the-apes\)](http://www.portfolio.com/companies-executives/2011/08/05/monkey-madness-in-branding-tied-to-planet-of-the-apes) For companies that have adopted monkey monikers, the new *Planet of the Apes* prequel might seem a golden opportunity to pound their chests. But some would rather retreat into the shadows to avoid any tie to "angry, raging, and resentful" apes.

Teresa Novellino writes for Portfolio.com

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