

The Monthly Security Awareness Newsletter for Computer Users

# OUCH!

## IN THIS ISSUE...

- Auto-complete
- Cc: / Bcc:
- Distribution lists
- Emotion & Privacy

## E-mail Dos and Don'ts

### GUEST EDITOR

Fred Kerby is the guest editor for this issue. He recently retired from the position of information assurance manager at the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division. He is also a SANS senior instructor and track lead for the Intro to Information Security course (SEC 301).

### OVERVIEW

E-mail has become one of the primary ways we communicate, both in our personal and professional lives. However, e-mail can be confusing to use, resulting in mistakes that can hurt you or your organization. Quite often we can be our own worst enemy when using e-mail. In this newsletter we will explain the most common mistakes people make with e-mail and how you can avoid them in your day-to-day life.

### AUTO-COMPLETE

When e-mailing a friend or co-worker, you often start by typing their e-mail address. For example, if you wanted to e-mail Fred Smith you would have to remember and type in his e-mail address `fsmith@example.com`. This can be a lot to remember, especially if the recipient has a complex e-

mail address or if your e-mail directory includes hundreds of people. With auto-complete, as you type the name of the person, your e-mail software automatically selects the e-mail address for you. This way you do not have to remember the e-mail address, just the recipient's name. The problem with auto-complete is when you have contacts with similar names. For example, you may think you are sending an e-mail to Fred Smith (your co-worker), but instead auto-complete selects Fred Johnson (your kid's soccer coach). As a result you end up sending sensitive company information to unauthorized people.

To protect yourself against this common mistake, always verify the name and the e-mail address of the recipient listed *before* you hit send. In addition, you may want to include the person's organization in the name displayed with their e-mail.

### CC /BCC

When sending an e-mail, the people you directly address it to may not be the only ones that get your e-mail message. Most e-mail clients also have two additional fields: Cc and Bcc. Cc stands for carbon copy. This means that while

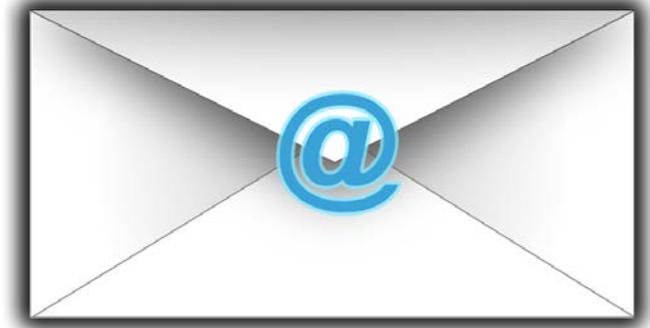
## E-mail Dos and Don'ts

your e-mail is not directed to the person in the Cc line, you want to keep them informed. For example, if you send an e-mail to a co-worker, you may cc your boss just to keep your boss current. Bcc means blind carbon copy. This is similar to Cc; however, the recipients on the To and Cc lines will not see the people you've included under Bcc.

Care should be taken when using Cc and Bcc. When someone sends you an e-mail and has cc'd people on the e-mail, you have to decide if you want to reply to just the sender or reply to everyone that was included on the cc. If your reply is sensitive in nature, you may want to reply only to the sender. If that is the case, be sure not to use the Reply All option, which will address your reply to all visible recipients from the original message. You may choose to use Bcc to copy someone privately, such as your boss. However, if your boss responds using Reply All, then all of the recipients will know that he was bcc'd on the original message - so much for your secret.

### DISTRIBUTION LISTS

Distribution lists are a collection of e-mail addresses represented by a single e-mail address, sometimes called a mail list or a group name. For example, you may have a distribution list with the e-mail address group@example.com. When you send an e-mail message to that address, that message is sent to everyone in the group, which could include perhaps hundreds or even thousands of people. Be very careful what you send to a distribution list. You would never want to accidentally send an e-mail to a group of people that was really only intended for a limited audience. You should also take care that your auto-complete feature doesn't select a distribution list. Your



***The best way to protect yourself when using e-mail is to slow down for a moment, think, and check before hitting send.***

intent may be to e-mail only a single person, such as your coworker Carl at carl@example.com, but auto-complete might send it instead to the distribution list you subscribed to about cars.

### EMOTION

Never send an e-mail when you are emotionally charged. If you are in an emotional state, that e-mail could cause you harm in the future, perhaps even costing you a friendship or



## E-mail Dos and Don'ts

a job. Instead, take a moment and calmly organize your thoughts. Get up and walk away from the computer. If you *have* to vent your frustration, another option is to open your e-mail client and make sure the To/Cc/Bcc fields are empty. Now go ahead and type exactly what you feel like saying. Then get up and walk away from your computer, perhaps make yourself a cup of tea. When you come back, delete the e-mail, and start over again. As a wise person once observed: "Draft today, send tomorrow."

### PRIVACY

Finally, remember that e-mail has few privacy protections. Just like a postcard sent through the mail, your e-mail can be read by anyone who gains access to it. In addition, unlike a phone call or personal conversation, once you send an e-mail you no longer have control over it. Your e-mail can easily be forwarded to others, posted on public forums, and may remain accessible on the Internet forever. If you have something truly private to communicate, e-mail may not be your best option.

### RESOURCES

Some of the links shown below have been shortened for greater readability using the TinyURL service. To mitigate

security issues, OUCH! always uses TinyURL's preview feature, which shows you the ultimate destination of the link and asks your permission before proceeding to it.

12 Tips For Better Email:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/6j4ferk>

Apple iMail:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/6dc6ac4>

Preventing Auto-Complete Disasters in Outlook:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/75lvglN>

Common Security Terms:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/6wkpae5>

SANS Security Tip of the Day:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/6s2wrkp>

### LEARN MORE

Subscribe to the monthly OUCH! security awareness newsletter, access the OUCH! archives, and learn more about SANS security awareness solutions by visiting us at <http://www.securingthehuman.org>

*OUCH! is published by the SANS Securing The Human program and is distributed under the [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 3.0 license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/). Permission is granted to distribute this newsletter as long as you reference the source, the distribution is not modified and it is not used for commercial purposes. For translating or more information, please contact [ouch@securingthehuman.org](mailto:ouch@securingthehuman.org).*

*Editorial Board: Bill Wyman, Walt Scrivens, Phil Hoffman, Lance Spitzner, Cara Mueller*