

Committee on computer resources

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The e-newsletter on technology at qcc

Social Engineering by Dr. Merlinda Drini

Many times when we open our mailbox, we notice an email from our IT security like this: "To All Faculty and Staff, The following phishing attack has been brought to my attention. I would like to remind everyone that hackers are constantly attempting to collect confidential information. If you receive an email asking for confidential information, do not respond back. Email is not a secure method of sending personal information. It is not consider good practice for the Government, Banks or Employers to ask for confidential information via email. Please be aware that CUNY Central has received phishing attacks targeting employees..."

If you were wondering what the phishing attack is, you should know it is part of a larger phenomenon known as social engineering. Social engineering means using knowledge of human nature to get information from people. This information is usually a network password or other personal information, such as income, preferences, hobbies and

Social engineers gather these data by simply asking the right questions. They use many different tactics to get the needed information: urgency, kindness, scarcity, position etc. They are the biggest security threat to an organization, and the most difficult to protect.

In general, social engineering is the process of deceiving people into giving confidential, private or privileged information or access to a hacker. Social engineers use different methods to access the information. Let's mention some of them:

Phishing

This is considered the most sophisticated attack that social engineers use. Phishing emails can be simple, when the attacker sends out a simple email message that may offer a reward, such as gifts, free trips, or reduced utility rates. The message is usually created as an urgent request to visit a fake

Although the web site is fake, the financial loss is real. One form of the phishing attack, called spear phishing, is intended to target specific people. It appears as coming from people that you know. In spear phishing the users are tricked to open an attachment or click a link, which can install the malware with shocking effects. If you receive a phishing e-mail, don't respond back, don't give any confidential information and don't open the suspicious attachment.

Vishing

Vishing is essentially phishing over the phone. An attacker will call someone impersonating, for example, an IT personnel, and with a little bit of information about a person either get login credentials or more information about the individual, such as a social security number. The users should know not to share the password with anyone and an IT technician will never ask for it.

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Dumpster Diving

Hackers examine someone's trash to find the different kind of information. It may be a discarded devices manual with the notes or even passwords, phone directories, meeting schedules, utility bills, minutes of meetings, and so on. This method as you can see, can produce a huge amount of information to the intruders. So, the users should be educated about the trash disposal. All documents should be shredded, even if the information is not important. The disks that contain company information should be formatted with the special software, but before the disposal the items should be placed in a locked place.

Tailgating – Piggybacking

This is a special method to gain access to the premises that are restricted to authorized personnel. The hackers enter secure areas by following an employee who already has the access card, and who is polite to hold the gate open. The best measure against tailgating, is to educate employees to not hold the doors to anybody and to notify the security for any suspicious people.

Thus, educating yourself about social engineering attacks, and ensuring that you follow the college policies is very important in mitigating these threats. There is no substitute for good human judgment and no automation will be 100 percent effective.

How we created my research group website with an eportfolio (Digication)

By: M. Chantale Damas and Denis Bejar

When I first started at QCC, I looked into creating my own webpage to put on the physics department website. I found out that it was not so simple because there were many steps that I needed to undertake: 1) I had to get the approval of marketing and had to follow the same format as QCC's website; 2) I could not upload it myself, the CLT in charge of the website had to do it; 3) There was no easy way for me to update it unless I wanted to go through the CLT every time. I asked about having an external website and was told that I could not do that. During the 2015 spring semester, I started a QCC Space Weather Research Group and had about eight students that enrolled in my independent study research course. I met with my students twice a week, but since the topic was unfamiliar, I wanted a way to share information and

resources with them and the idea of having a website resurfaced. By this time, I had taken a number of workshops with Denis Bejar from Academic Computing, and I decided to seek his help.

I met with Denis at the end of the 2015 spring semester and he showed me some very nice websites that were created by students through an eportfolio System (Digication), as part of a pilot project. Denis created the first page of my website in less than five minutes. He also told me that Digication was very easy to use and in less than one hour I could have a functioning website. I had my doubts at first, but he was absolutely correct! I went home and created my own research page. What was really great about using Digication is that you can create your dream website and put in it what you want, i.e., pictures, student projects, videos, etc. The absolutely best part is that you can get plenty of help from Denis and his very capable assistants. There are many advantages to creating websites with eportfolio/Digication: 1) it is very user-friendly and easy to use; 2) you can tailor it to your needs and those of your students; 3) you can add videos, documents and links to make your website very interactive. No need to bother the CLTs to update it for you; 4) it's a great²

The eportfolio system can be used by academic departments; faculty; research group; independent research courses; summer programs, conference/meeting pages, etc. I would recommend creating a conceptual map that lays out what you want on your website before you began the task of creating your website.

A conceptual map will save you a lot of time. The assistants can also help with that. I did not do that when I first created my website and it took many iterations to have a product that I was satisfied with.

Digication also provides a few Course Management features, however I would not recommend the eportfolio system for regular courses and would use Blackboard instead. Blackboard provides a complete suite of Learning Management Tools such as student roster, grading, rubrics, online tests, plagiarism detection tool, etc. And since it is CUNY's official Learning Management System, all courses and student enrollment are automatically setup for each course.

Overall, I highly recommend the eportfolio system for its versatility and usability, especially for websites that need to be regularly updated.

Acknowledgement: M. Chantale Damas would like to thank Denis Bejar and his student assistants for their assistance with my research website. A special thank you to Lena Morales for her patience and dedication!

If you are interested in creating your own website through eportfolio, please contact Denis Bejar (dbejar@gcc.cuny.edu). Academic Computing also offers many other workshops.

About the Authors:

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Email Storage Practices by Jed Shahar

Ugh. You check your email, and there it is, with everything else you have to worry about, now you have one more thing to do. “Your mailbox is almost full.”

Faculty email accounts hold 781 megabytes of information, or about 350 photos, or about 8,000 pages of documents. Of course that is both a lot and not that much. Many of us use our email accounts for a number of purposes, and one of the most common uses is using the Inbox and Sent Messages as a personal archive of assignments, correspondence, receipts, applications, submissions, among other bits of information. It is thus worrisome when we feel we need to pare down this archive. So what to do?

First, it helps to know how to find out how much space you have in your mailbox in the first place, and the easiest way to do this is in Microsoft Outlook. In Outlook, if you right click the mailbox and select Account Properties from the drop down menu, the next screen will show you a bar graph telling you how much of your email space is used and how much is free.

Next, the simplest way to free up space is to have your emails listed by size. If you can identify any large documents that you no longer need on the email server, either because you don’t need them or because you have or will download them onto a hard drive, then you should delete these files (after making sure they are downloaded of course). Make sure you do this with your Sent Messages folder as well. Finally empty your Deleted Items. Now recheck your email storage. That should have helped (I just saved 25 MBs of space).

Another trick is to organize your Inbox by messages who sent them to you. You can then perhaps identify a few series of emails that can be deleted. There is also in Outlook on the Home tab a function to “Clean Up.” This generally finds duplicate messages in your files and places them into the Deleted Items folder. You must again empty the Deleted Items (this only saved me 1 MB).

But perhaps the best way to save some space is to archive your email library*. Archiving your emails takes emails older than a certain date and moves them into a folder on the hard drive of your computer for you to access whenever you are at that computer. You will no longer be able to search for these files remotely either from the Web App email interface or your phone, but this will likely free up a lot of space and still allow you to use your emails as an archive of correspondence.

The simplest way to archive your emails is to open the “File” tab in Outlook and select the “Cleanup Tools” button. In the drop down menu, you next select “Archive.” Finally you select what folders (I chose my whole email account) you want to archive, and you select a date (I chose two years ago) when you went to archive from. Once you click OK, the archiving will begin, and again you will be able to access these emails as long as you are on the computer from which you are archiving (I saved 130 MBs of space!).

It is also possible to set up auto archiving, which would do this process automatically, but that is for another day. For now, you don’t have to worry about that “Your mailbox is almost full” message. Next up on the to-do list? That email telling you that in 14 days your password will expire. Ugh. Here we go again.

Figure 1
 Number of Partially On-line Courses (PNET) and Fully On-line Courses (FNET)
 Between Spring 2012 and Fall 2015

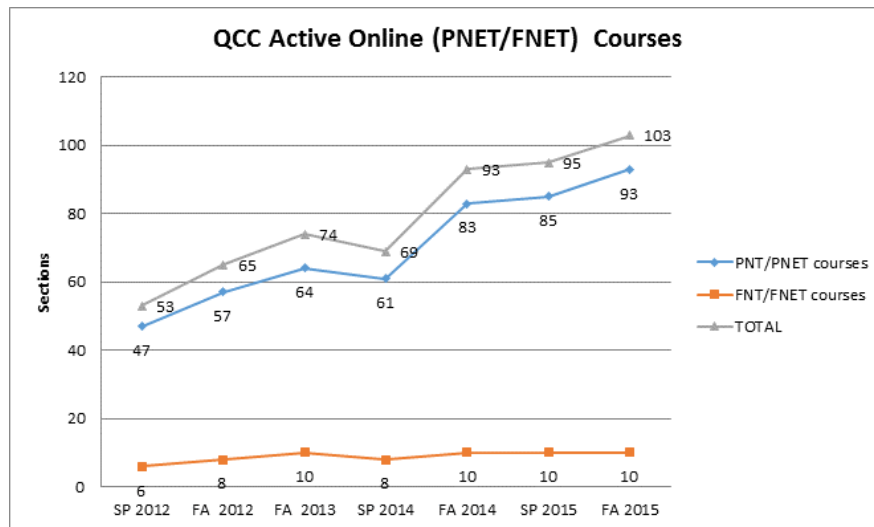


Figure 2

Statistics for our L-117 and LB-14 computer labs in the chart below for period of 8/27/15 to 4/16/2016, reflecting the Fall 2015-Spring 2016 of the current academic year:

| Room | Total Visits | Total Seat Hrs | Ave Visit Time (Min) |
|------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------------|
| L-117 Main Area | 13125 | 93301.90 | 426.52 |
| L-117 Small Room | 7192 | 57441.68 | 479.21 |
| LB-24 | 9414 | 29933.70 | 190.78 |
| Total | 31757 | 194059.24 | 366.65 |

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