

Getting paid

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Ever wonder how “hackers” make money by infecting your computer? Well sit back and get ready to take a sickening ride down the dark alleys “hackers” use for profit.

The first, and most damaging way, is through identity/financial account theft. The repercussions of this are immense and have a huge pay off to the “hackers”. Not only does it give them the ability to drain your accounts of funds, but they will also collect large amounts of credit card numbers and personal information and sell them to other “hackers”...or even worse, to overseas criminal groups. This doesn't even need to be put into layman's terms; everyone knows it's a bad deal.

The second way is through tracking your surfing habits. “Hackers” can get paid big bucks to perform “surveys” ie. “Tracking” and then turn the information over to large businesses or websites. Cut rate “surveys” are a bargain to big and little businesses.

The third way is through click through or generated traffic. Here's an example, a “hacker” will approach a web firm, offering them a guaranteed amount of web traffic. They would then get paid based on how much traffic was generated. With many of the infections out there, you could be suffering from internal pop-ups. These pop-ups don't come from a website; they actually count as a click to a website. So if a “hacker” has 10,000 infected computers and he starts loading through all the website pop-ups the sites he gets paid per click, and say it's only a half cent per click, he's looking at \$50 per pop-up. Now multiply that by how many websites rotate through the pop-ups. 30 sites at \$50 per site? Yeah, that's \$1,500 in easy money and even more the longer it goes on for.

The fourth way is through spam. Many trojans will open a port in the system to the internet. The “hacker” then runs a spamming script that runs through your system and then floods people with spam. Sometimes these are called “spam bots” or “Zombies”, meaning there are either robots (automated programs) or under the control of a “hacker”. And how do they make money off of this? Have you checked your inbox lately? Medications, Male Enhancements, Fake Watches, Email Scams...etc. There is a lot of money to be had if you spam a company or product.

The fifth way is perhaps the least known but potentially the most destructive and criminal way. We've mentioned “Zombie” systems, which are under the control of another program or person. “Hackers” will collect large numbers of “Zombies” or systems infected with Rootkits (which allow full control as well). When they have enough, they will then “sell” time or access to these super computer cells. What can be done with 500 computers that would be worth money? How about flooding competitors websites and crashing them? Have some encryption you need cracked? Want to tunnel into a private network? These are a few of what can be done with these cells, but the worst part about it is that it's being used by organized crime. They've moved into the Digital Age with what they do.

There is a sixth way that has seen a significant rise in the last few years. We call it scamware. It's a program that installs with no clear permissions, and will then proceed to advertise itself at start up, when you surf, and even when you aren't doing anything on the system at all! They will often tell you that your system is infected with a large number of infections. You need buy the program in order to remove all of those “infections” they supposedly found on your system. It's a scam and are bogus findings. Many of these programs like to do things like change your wallpaper and remove your ability to change it back. Block you from accessing the Task manager (Ctrl+Alt+Delete). Hide your desktop and icons. Blank out your Control Panel. These are nasty money scam programs and should be removed ASAP!

There are many ways to stay clean. Know what sites you've been to, know where your kids are going on the net, since they are the biggest targets of infections. But the most important thing is to **not waste time**! Once an infection is present in the system, the clock starts ticking. Get it cleaned and do not procrastinate! We do this kind of cleaning on a daily basis at Heida Computers. We know what to look for, we know what it does, and we know how to get it out of the system with minimal damage to Windows.