

More data thefts affect individuals, Verizon report finds

Somini Sengupta

Of the 855 data thefts that were reported to law enforcement authorities last year, 97 percent could have been avoided through basic, relatively inexpensive safety measures, according to an annual report released on Thursday by Verizon.

The majority of those thefts, 58 percent, were carried out by so-called hacktivists, or hackers with an ideological agenda, the report concludes. But it's worth bearing in mind that Verizon's tally does not include heists that private companies kept to themselves. Hacktivists who operate under the banner of Anonymous and its offshoots disclose their handiwork – usually by broadcasting it on Twitter and dumping their stolen goods on Pastebin and BitTorrent. "The online world was rife with the clashing of ideals, taking the form of activism, protests, retaliation and pranks," Verizon wrote in its report.

Unlike in the past, the impact of data breaches on individuals has become acute. In 2011, 95 percent of the stolen data included what is known as personally identifiable information: names, e-mail addresses and Social Security numbers, which are all targets of Anonymous and its affiliates. By contrast, in 2010, only 1 percent of the stolen data included such individual information.

Where did the thieves come from? Nearly 70 percent of the breaches originated in Eastern Europe. Two-thirds of all breaches required "low" or "very low" skill levels.

Verizon recommended that businesses, small and large, take basic steps to protect themselves, including installing firewalls, changing default credentials to log onto Web sites and analyzing "event logs" of network traffic for suspicious activity. Among its recommendations is one that is perhaps the easiest and most humanly difficult: at a time when storing huge amounts of data is easy and cheap, security experts urge that companies destroy information when it is no longer essential.

When a hacktivist group penetrated the network of Stratfor, a geopolitical risk analysis company, in December, it found five years' worth of e-mail communications, which WikiLeaks in turn released onto the Internet.

Fonte: The New York Times, New York, 22 Mar. 2012, Internacional, On-line.