

Staying Safe Doesn't Get Any Easier

OK. Moving from the theoretical to the real.

Since these scam articles were begun a year ago, we have touched on gift card scams, phishing scams and others. While this month's offering was originally meant to spotlight another offering from those without souls, an incident occurred that changed our focus. The chairperson of our newsletter committee was attacked, having her email capability hijacked. So, now we're faced with detailing not how attacks *might* work but how this phishing/gift card attack *did* work.

Many of us received an initial email from "Vicki" that read, *"Hi, touching base to see if you're available via email now ? I need a little request from you thanks."* So, whenever a neighbor asks for help, we respond, even though grammatical errors fuel some suspicion here.

The next email reads, *"Thank you very much am facing a little challenge right now, I've been trying to order an Amazon Gift Card E-mail Delivery for my Niece on Amazon. It's her birthday. I promised to get it for her but it says they are having issues charging my card. I was wondering if you could help me order an Amazon E-code gift card over from your Amazon account? Let me know if you can help me out on this so that I can send you her email, so the E-code can be sent there. I'm only looking to spend \$200 on it, I'll refund it back to you as soon as possible thanks."*

Now, it's perfectly clear. This is an email hijacking attack. Reaching Vicki via phone, she confirms this. It's obvious that all of her contacts have received the same messages.

What to do when this happens and how did it happen?

Any victim of this type of attack needs to do a number of things, and quickly.

- Notify all those in the user's contact list that this is fake.
- Secure the email system to make sure that this won't happen again.

- At a minimum, resetting passwords and reviewing all security safeguards becomes necessary.
- Sometimes deleting the email address and establishing a new one is required.

The typical facilitating elements of email hijacking attacks are:

- The user's computer has been infected by a virus in some way.
- The email provider's security systems have been breached.



As a follow up, an effort was made to pinpoint the origin of this specific attack. This is difficult to achieve with 100% certainty but it appears that the attack originated in Lithuania. If any are interested in the methodology involved, the author is happy to share.

An Object Lesson

This, no matter how careful we are, can happen to any of us. Email accounts and Social Media accounts can all be hacked. Again, strong passwords, care in how we share information and who we interact with are key components to our on line safety. How this breach occurred will remain a mystery. Any information shared or stored online, including email address books, are at some level of risk. Security procedures warrant constant review.

And remember. **Don't talk to strangers!**

Any comments, clarifications or questions should be directed to the author at jg6217@gmail.com.

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