
What drives a hacker – thrills, power or money?

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Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine the motivation of an internet hacker. To obtain sufficient information, two key research techniques were implemented, a survey and most importantly a literature review. The survey was carried out on twenty random people from the general public of central Christchurch.

Literature review

Some selected examples of writings found include Hiaasen et al (2009) who identified Albert Gonzalez as the person responsible for one of the largest ever cybercrimes. Gonzalez started hacking because of the thrill he gained from it. However as time went on his intentions were for financial gain. Overall he stole at least 170 million credit card numbers and made millions of dollars as a result. \$1.1 million alone was found buried in his parent's backyard. He is facing a life sentence for the numerous cases against him.

IT Security (2007) reviewed five of the most famous hacking cases at that time and found that the motivations were for fun, seeing what they could get away with, intellectual stimulus, notoriety, identifying security flaws, free software, financial gain and curiosity. These incentives are not new to the issue of what motivates a hacker; they are in fact sharing a repetitive pattern from which a key set of motivators can be identified.

In summarising the motivators of a hacker, Zamora (2003) claims the key word is information. If we take this theory, then when hackers are searching for credit

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card details, personal credentials, IP addresses, business secrets or software code they are indeed searching for information. However, because information is such a generalised it is important that we still understand the motives such as financial gain, thrill, power, curiosity, intellectual stimulus, revenge or the ability to cause mischief.

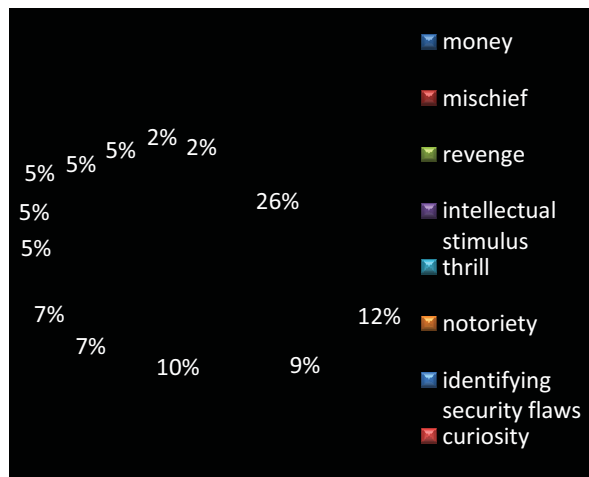


Figure 1 – Reported motivators of Hackers

Results

As a result of a survey, Figure 1 represents the percentage of each motivator recognised in the literature review. The six highest motivators according to literature are money, mischief, revenge, intellectual stimulus, thrill and notoriety. Some of the highest motivators recognised are simply the cases that have been brought to media attention. Comparisons between the literature review and the survey are found in Table 1.

Motivator	Literature Review	Survey Results
Financial Gain (Money)	26%	12%
Mischief	12%	12%
Revenge	9%	10%
Intellectual Stimulus	10%	10%
Thrill	7%	10%
Notoriety	7%	10%
Gender: Male	19%	80%
Unknown	81%	20%

Table 1 – Comparison motivators of Hackers

Conclusions

In summary, the research shows that financial gain and the ability to cause mischief are the two most common drives for internet hackers. Motivational objectives vary between age ranges and the top two motivations for internet hackers are related to the mainstream of hackers identified around the world.

References (Selected)

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