Roseland-Online.co.uk
South Central Cornwall's Community Website

EMAIL ACCOUNT HACKING – WHAT TO DO

Dear Readers

As you may be aware, Email account hacking has become rife and it is a concern not only for the recipient, but more so the victim of the hacking.

Hackers not only access your account and send out emails to everyone in your address book with spam mail (the more elaborate asking for money to be sent abroad as someone in the family has befallen a mishap) but of late, they have been copying and then erasing your contacts list and saved emails, too – as a friend of mine this week encountered on her Yahoo! account.

To combat this, ***Roseland Online*** has created this document to users of public accounts like Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo! and Googlemail, etc. to give help and advice into preventing these stressful hackings and what to do if they do happen to you. Feel free to pass this on to whomever you may feel will benefit from knowing the information herein and we recommend you store this on your computer where it will be accessible should this unfortunate occurrence befall you.

Prevention

Change Your Password.

To prevent hacking on your account, we recommend you **change your password** fairly regularly. Although hackers use quote sophisticated tools to access your account, the harder your password is to access (using a mixture of numbers, capital, and lowercase letters in your password) and the more often it is changed, the harder it will be for hackers. It's a pain, I know, but there it is and the harder it is for them to do, they may well move on!

For example, try using capital letters and numbers in the place of normal lower case letters. This will increase the strength of your password. For example, If my password was the word, "roseland", I might start with a capital R and use the number zero instead of the 'o' to add complexity, making the word, "R0seland". Combinations like this are a great way of changing your existing password, so it's easier to use. Try using number 1 or 3 instead of respectively an 'I' or 'E', for example. Anything you can do to make it more complex, the better.

Back up your address book.

Although many email account providers like Hotmail and Googlemail, etc. can reinstate an address book that was once full (more on this below), it's much better to backup yourself regularly. This is easy to do in many cases and if you follow the 'f.a.q' or 'help' section of your email provider, instructions will be there for you to follow. **Remember**: when someone has spammed everyone in your address book then deleted your address book, it can be very stressful not being able to access your friends/colleagues to tell them about it for over 24/48 hours whilst your provider reinstates it… if they can at all. So back up regularly… it's worth it!

Back up your emails.

As with your address book above, there are simple ways to backup and reinstate your saved emails. Again, follow the 'f.a.q' or 'help' section of your email provider and find out how to do this. As in the case of my friend who was running a business, if it's gone, it's gone. And that can be exceptionally damaging both for a private person and a business… so backup!

What To Do If You Get Hacked

First, *don't panic!* Apart from deleting emails and address books (most of which can be reinstated), hackers can only send out emails to your address book asking them to go somewhere or do something. They rarely send viruses this way, just begging or marketing emails. If a friend of yours knows you well, they'll know it's odd and get back to you, so don't worry!

Change Password.

Right, first up you need to **change your password**. Even if you did it only yesterday, once they've hacked your account, they can do it again, so change it again. Here's how:

Somewhere – sometimes in the top right of your screen and in small letters – you'll have a word saying 'Account Options' or just 'Options'. If you click on that, you may get a 'dropdown menu' you'll need to look for something saying 'settings' or 'account settings' Maybe if it's not clear you may have to first find 'mail' and then the settings there.

Then, usually under 'general settings', or 'password' you'll find the option to 'change your password'. All accounts are different, so apologies if these exact options are visible. If in doubt, search 'change your password' in the 'f.a.q' or 'help' section and your provider will guide you through it.

Diverted Account

Once you've changed your password, it would be wise to check whether the hackers have put an **automated 'divert'** on your account. This usually works by sending all emails that are for your email account to a different email address other than your own. This way the hackers can continue pretending to be you when your contacts answer you. Frustrating, I know, but these guys are getting cleverer and cleverer (or should that read sneakier and sneakier?)!

Again, in the 'account options' or 'options', you will find a section called 'forwarding'. If when you go into this section it has a forwarding address there, you must delete this address or click 'don't forward' or something like this. Again, if you search 'forwarding emails to another account' in your 'f.a.q' or 'help' section, your provider will guide you through it.

(N.B.: If you already have a divert on this account, check it is EXACTLY right. The hackers on my friend's account set up another identical address, just one letter was different, so it was almost impossible to see immediately. Like I say, they're getting cleverer and cleverer.)

Info ring Your Provider

OK, if you've done all of the above, you've probably stopped any future problems for the time being at least. Now you need to inform your provider of what has happened. This way they can

reinstate your emails and/or address book, if yours have been deleted.

Just so you know; providers have to backup all information on a regular basis in case their own computers go down, so they will have multiple backups of your data on various systems. All they need do is to access this and reinstate it onto your account, so it's not much of a chore for them, so make use of them… **but request a backup quickly as they can often only back up a few days, or a week in arrears at most.**

Contact Us

You'll need to go into your provider's 'contact us' section. Somewhere there they will give you options as to what it is you're contacting them about. 'Mail' might be a first option, then 'Spamming' and/or 'Hacking'. Providers take spamming and especially hacking very seriously, so they are interested to hear from anyone who suffers from it.

Once you've found the right section, you may be asked a few questions like when you want it reinstated from. Just put in today's date if it's your entire contact/email list as this is the last backup you'll be wanting. Again, if you can't find this, try searching for 'reinstate address book' or 'lost contacts/emails' in the search part of your 'help' or 'f.a.q' section and there'll be sure to be a how-to on this.

It is important to do this AFTER you've changed your password and checked if the account is being forwarded; if you don't and your provider tries to contact you to help or send you details of what to do next, you might not receive the email because it may be forwarded to the other account the hackers had set up.

You're Done!

Once you've done all of the above, just take a deep breath and have a cuppa. It's unlikely (although not unheard of) that hackers come back to the same account twice, but remember, the more you can do to make life hard for them, the less likely they are to hack you and your friends. And the more backing up you do, the less stress you'll endure if they do hack you again!

Apologies if this is long-winded and complicated, but that's just the way it so sometimes…

…and here's to a hack and spam-free future for us all and hope this helps in some way!

Best wishes

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