Phishing for information

Cybercriminals prefer attacks that do the most amount of damage with the least amount of effort.
One of the most popular forms of social engineering that meets this description is phishing.
Phishing is the use of digital communications to trick people into revealing sensitive data or deploying malicious software.
Phishing leverages many communication technologies, but the term is mainly used to describe attacks that arrive by email.
Phishing attacks don't just affect individuals.
They are also harmful to organizations.
A single employee that falls for one of these tricks can give malicious attackers access to systems.
Once inside, attackers can exploit sensitive data like customer names and product secrets.
Attackers who carry out these attacks commonly use phishing kits.
A phishing kit is a collection of software tools needed to launch a phishing campaign.
People with little technical background can use one of these kits.
Each of the tools inside are designed to avoid detection.
As a security professional, you should be aware of the three main tools inside a phishing kit, so that you can quickly identify when they're being used and put a stop to it.
The first is malicious attachments.
These are files that are infected and can cause harm to the organization's systems.
Phishing kits also include fake-data collection forms.
These forms look like legitimate forms, like a survey.
Unlike a real survey, they ask for sensitive information that isn't normally asked for in an email.
The third resource they include are fraudulent web links.
These open to malicious web pages that are designed to look like trusted brands.
Unlike actual websites, these fraudulent sites are built to steal information, like login credentials.
Cybercriminals can use these tools to launch a phishing attack in many forms.
The most common is through malicious emails.
However, they can use them in other forms of communication too.
Most recently, cybercriminals are using smishing and vishing to trick people into revealing private information.
Smishing is the use of text messages to obtain sensitive information or to impersonate a known source.
You've probably received these types of messages before.
Not only are smishing messages annoying to receive, they're also difficult to prevent. That's why some attackers send them.
Some smishing messages are easy to detect.
They might show signs of being malicious like promising a cash reward for clicking an attached link that shouldn't be clicked.
Other times, smishing is hard to spot.
Attackers sometimes use local area codes to appear legitimate.
Some hackers can even send messages disguised as friends and families of their target to fool them into disclosing sensitive information.

Vishing is the exploitation of electronic voice communication to obtain sensitive information or impersonate a known source.
During vishing attacks, criminals pretend to be someone they're not.
For example, attackers might call pretending to be a company representative.
They might claim that there's a problem with your account.
And they can offer to fix it if you provide them with sensitive information.
Most organizations use a few basic security measures to prevent these and any other types of phishing attacks from becoming a problem.
For example, anti-phishing policies spread awareness and encourage users to follow data security procedures correctly.
Employee training resources also help inform employees about things to look for when an email looks suspicious.
Another line of defence against phishing is securing email inboxes.
Email filters are commonly used to keep harmful messages from reaching users.
For example, specific email addresses can be blocked using a block-list.
Organizations often use other filters, like allow-lists, to specify IP addresses that are approved to send mail within the company.
Organizations also use intrusion prevention systems to look for unusual patterns in email traffic.
Security analysts use monitoring tools like this to spot suspicious emails, quarantine them, and produce a log of events.
Phishing campaigns are popular and dangerous forms of social engineering that organizations of all sizes need to deal with.
Just a single compromised password that an attacker can get their hands on can lead to a costly data breach.
Now that you're familiar with the tools these attackers use, you're better equipped to spot phishing and prevent it.

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