

1.1.4 Threat Actors

Before you can understand how an ethical hacker or penetration tester can mimic a **threat actor** (or malicious attacker), you need to understand the different types of threat actors. The following are the most common types of malicious attackers we see today. Select each for more information.

Organized Crime

Several years ago, the cybercrime industry took over the number-one spot, previously held by the drug trade, for the most profitable illegal industry. As you can imagine, it has attracted a new type of cybercriminal. Just as it did back in the days of Prohibition, organized crime goes where the money is. Organized crime consists of very well-funded and motivated groups that will typically use any and all of the latest attack techniques. Whether that is ransomware or data theft, if it can be monetized, organized crime will use it.

Hacktivists

This type of threat actor is not motivated by money. Hacktivists are looking to make a point or to further their beliefs, using cybercrime as their method of attack. These types of attacks are often carried out by stealing sensitive data and then revealing it to the public for the purpose of embarrassing or financially affecting a target.

State-Sponsored Attackers

Cyber war and cyber espionage are two terms that fit into this category. Many governments around the world today use cyber attacks to steal information from their opponents and cause disruption. Many believe that the next Pearl Harbor will occur in cyberspace. That's one of the reasons the United States declared cyberspace to be one of the operational domains that U.S. forces would be trained to defend.

Insider Threats

An insider threat is a threat that comes from inside an organization. The motivations of these types of actors are normally different from those of many of the other common threat actors. Insider threats are often normal employees who are tricked into divulging sensitive information or mistakenly clicking on links that allow attackers to gain access to their computers. However, they could also be malicious insiders who are possibly motivated by revenge or money.

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