Social networking sites a premier target for hackers

On the web, hackers, spammers, and phishers can make a healthy living just by exploiting known security holes that many users haven't bothered to patch. Most security attacks are targeted at a few weak points on PCs that are not that hard to protect.

Simon Campbell-Young, CEO of Phoenix Software points out that as the use of social networks has grown, so have the security risks associated with them. Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook are now the web's premier targ for hackers, who use them not only to spread malware, but to access people's personal and company information through social engineering.

"Web attacks are driven by crime. Most occur because the hacker wants money, not glory," says Campbell-Young. "In th past, PCs were mainly under threat from viruses and worms which were created only to spread or to cause damage to file and PCs. But in recent years, the situation has changed drastically. Today, the biggest threat faced by computers is crimeware. This malicious software is written by cybercriminals with the purpose of making money illegally. Crimeware ma take the form of viruses, worms, Trojans or other malicious programs."

Crimeware programmes are Trojans

Crimeware is malicious software that is covertly installed on computers. Most crimeware progammes are in fact Trojans, designed to do different things. Some are used to log every key typed (keyloggers), some capture screenshots when banking websites are used, some download other malicious code, and others let a remote hacker access a system. What they have in common is the ability to 'steal' your confidential information - such as passwords and PINs - and send it back the criminal. Armed with this information, the cybercriminal is then able to steal your money.

Campbell-Young says that there are several steps you can take to protect your computer from today's cyber threats, starti with installing effective Internet security software. However, he points out that PCs and laptops are no longer a hacker's or point of entry to personal information, as tablets and smartphones change the computing landscape.

"Security software has become just as important on our mobile devices as on our computers. These smart devices are continually exposed to new, sophisticated threats on a daily basis. Mobile devices are the new hotspot for malware attacks Because your smartphone faces the same vulnerabilities as your PC, you need to protect it just as carefully," he says.