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The Monthly Security Awareness Newsletter for You

Fake News

What is Fake News?

Generally speaking, fake news is a false narrative that is published and promoted as if it were true. Historically, fake news was usually propaganda put out by those in power to create a certain belief or support a certain position, even if it was completely false. Social media has now created an environment where anyone with an agenda can publish falsehoods as if they were truths. People can be paid to post fake news on behalf of someone else or automated programs, often called bots, can publish auto-generated fake news. The motivations as to why people create and distribute fake news are as numerous as there are individual opinions.

The Dangers of Fake News

While some examples of fake news seem innocent or just an attempt at fun, a lot of it can be malicious and even dangerous. Fake news is created to change people's beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions, so they will ultimately change their behavior. This means if you fall into the trap of believing fake news, your beliefs and your decisions are being driven by someone else's agenda. Also, in some parts of the world, there can be legal consequences for publishing and sharing fake news.

How to Spot Fake News

So how do you protect yourself from fake news? The most effective way is to only trust something once you can verify it.

- **Consider the Source**: Think about the actual source of the news. A local blog will not be as trustworthy as a major academic journal. What does the source stand for? What are their objectives?
- **Supporting Sources**: Look at the sources cited in the article. Are they themselves credible? Do they even exist?
- **Multiple Sources**: Don't just rely on a single article. The more you read from various sources, the more likely you can draw accurate conclusions. Also consider diverse sources and perspectives, for example, news from different countries or authors with different backgrounds.

- **Check the Author**: Who is the author? Research them to see if they are a credible author, their reputation in the community, whether they have a specific agenda, or if the person posting is a real person. Are they authoring within their field of expertise?
- **Check the Date**: Make sure that the date is recent and that it is not an older story simply rehashed.
- **Comments**: Even if the article, video, or post is legitimate, be careful of comments posted in response. Quite often links or comments posted in response can be auto-generated by bots or by people hired to put out bad, confusing, or false information.
- **Check Your Biases**: Be objective. Could your own biases influence your response to the article? A problem that we humans often run into is that we only read sources that simply confirm what we already believe in. Challenge yourself by reading other sources you normally would not review.
- **Check the Funding:** Even legitimate publications have sponsors and advertisers who can influence an article or source. Check to see if the article is funded, and if so by whom.
- **Repost carefully:** Fake news relies on believers to repost, retweet, or otherwise forward false information. If you're uncertain as to the authenticity of an article, think twice or hold off on sharing it with others.

Conclusion

In today's fast-paced world of social media, fake news surrounds us every day. If you are not careful, you run the risk of believing and acting upon it. Take the time to follow these basic steps to help ensure you make informed decisions based on facts.

Guest Editor

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Resources

Poster: How to Spot Fake News http://blogs.ifla.org/lpa/files/2017/01/How-to-Spot-Fake-News-1.jpg
Social Engineering: https://www.sans.org/security-awareness-training/ouch-newsletter/2017/social-engineering

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