

Spear Phishing vs Phishing: What's the Difference?

May 3, 2023

What is spear phishing?

Phishing is a generic, broad attack addressed to hundreds or thousands of recipients. In comparison, spear phishing is a targeted, personalized attack addressed to specific individuals. The goal is to gain confidential information for fraudulent purposes.

How does it work?

The attacker will identify and research their target to craft a highly personalized email and convince the victim to share data. The victim opens the email, containing malware, and the attacker now has access to steal data.

New Trend

A new trend, as mentioned in [Futurism | Science and Technology News](#) article is the usage and abuse of language processing tools, by cybercriminals. They use something like ChatGPT, which is driven by AI (Artificial Intelligence) and makes it easier to personalize spear-phishing emails. Often times, scam emails are easily identified with bad grammar errors or misspellings. Using AI changes that.

Spear phishing requires much time to plan, research and gather details about a target. AI could possibly automate this process completely, making this method more attractive to use. Criminals only need to scroll your social media, input the information into the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) which creates a highly-believable tailored email. The complexity of emails generated, by AI, even has the ability to bypass SPAM networks (such as our Barracuda).

How to Spot a Spear Phishing Attempt

Spot the sender – carefully review the sending email

Peruse the subject line – watch out for emails striking a sense of urgency

Examine links or attachments – be on the lookout for forms requesting sensitive information

Assess the content – personal information may be found online through public records/social media

Rquest confirmation – if something still does not seem right, do not reply, send a new email to the address you have on file to confirm

Revision #1

Created 6 February 2025 21:26:46 by Laura J. Crapps

Updated 26 February 2025 03:35:37 by Laura J. Crapps