

TEEN HACKERS

Some teens spray graffiti, some get piercings, some skip school and then some become hackers. Is hacking just another way to rebel or is it more serious than that?

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HACKING?

1 What is a hacker?

- A someone who downloads music from the internet.
- B someone who breaks into other people's computers.
- C A virtual-reality version of a real person.

3 Which of the following is not true?

- A A hacker can activate a webcam and watch you while you use your computer.
- B A hacker can erase your entire computer.
- C Pictures are completely safe and never contain viruses.

2 True or False?

The only way for viruses to enter your computer is through the internet. T F

Answers on Page 14



Sven Jaschan, teen hacker

FIVE SCARY HACKING FACTS

- ➔ Hackers and viruses could cause the entire internet to crash by 2006, according to a Finnish IT expert.
- ➔ Hackers can steal your identity without you even knowing, finding out exactly who you are by monitoring what you do online.
- ➔ A new 'worm' virus can activate your webcam and broadcast it on the internet, so anyone can see you while you're at your computer.
- ➔ Hackers usually claim they are only 'curious,' and refer to those who hack into computers to cause harm 'crackers.'
- ➔ Over 50 per cent of US companies have been hacked in the last 12 months.

Last year 18-year-old Sven Jaschan from Germany admitted creating the Sasser Internet worm¹ that spread rapidly around the world. The worm attacked recent versions of Microsoft's Windows operating systems, continually shutting them down and re-booting² them. Banks were disrupted and airlines were unable to use their computers for air traffic control; hospitals in America couldn't use some life-saving machines. It cost companies a lot of money, but it could have also cost lives.

After six unmarked police cars turned up at Jaschan's parents house to arrest him, a neighbour described him as a loner who didn't mix with people easily and spent as much time on his computer as he could. This profile fits many hackers; but not all of them are as intent on being disruptive as Jaschan, who could face up to five years in prison.

Virus writers

Mario, 16, is a secondary school student in Austria who sits for hours writing viruses and worms — but he doesn't send them out. "Anyone can rewrite a hard drive³ with just a few lines of code," says Mario. "It's lame* and mean." He has written a program that shows you how to write your own Trojan horse. This virus arrives as an attachment that looks like it might be a jpeg⁴ for a picture or video; instead, the virus inserts new commands, ordering the computer to erase its hard drive.

Mario is so proud of his creation he has posted it on his website. Even though he doesn't send the Trojan horse viruses himself, he is helping others to do so. Teens who don't actually have the knowledge to write a virus but are keen to see how they work are known as 'Script Kiddies.' They are often the ones who send the virus out even though they know they are not supposed to. In some cases the virus writers claim it isn't their fault and they didn't intend to unleash* them. Do those who do send viruses have any

sympathy for victims? "No, you're supposed to have up-to-date virus software," explains a hacker calling himself Frank4stein.

Status

Many teen virus writers are like graffiti artists. They have assumed names and like being 'creative.' They contact other hackers online, and there are now even hacking clubs and conferences. However, other virus writers have specific companies they want to target*. The most common one is Microsoft because it is the biggest — and hackers want to expose its flaws*. They see their quest as almost moral as virus writing strengthens the immunity* of the internet by showing companies where their weaknesses are. They want their virus to become famous. If a company is outraged or offering a reward for them, the virus writers take that as a sign of success in the hacking community.

Others have a far less moral motivation — stealing money, deleting information or, in some cases, revenge. One virus writer admits his motivation is

his anger that he wasn't hired by certain companies he applied to — so he is going to send them a Trojan horse virus that claims to be a CV.

What next?

The virus many ordinary computer users fear most is a key logger virus. It stays undetectable in a computer touched. Why? It can work out passwords to websites and online bank accounts. Today's harmless teen geeks* could become tomorrow's computer terrorists — or alternatively a manager at Microsoft.

Discussion

Read the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree:

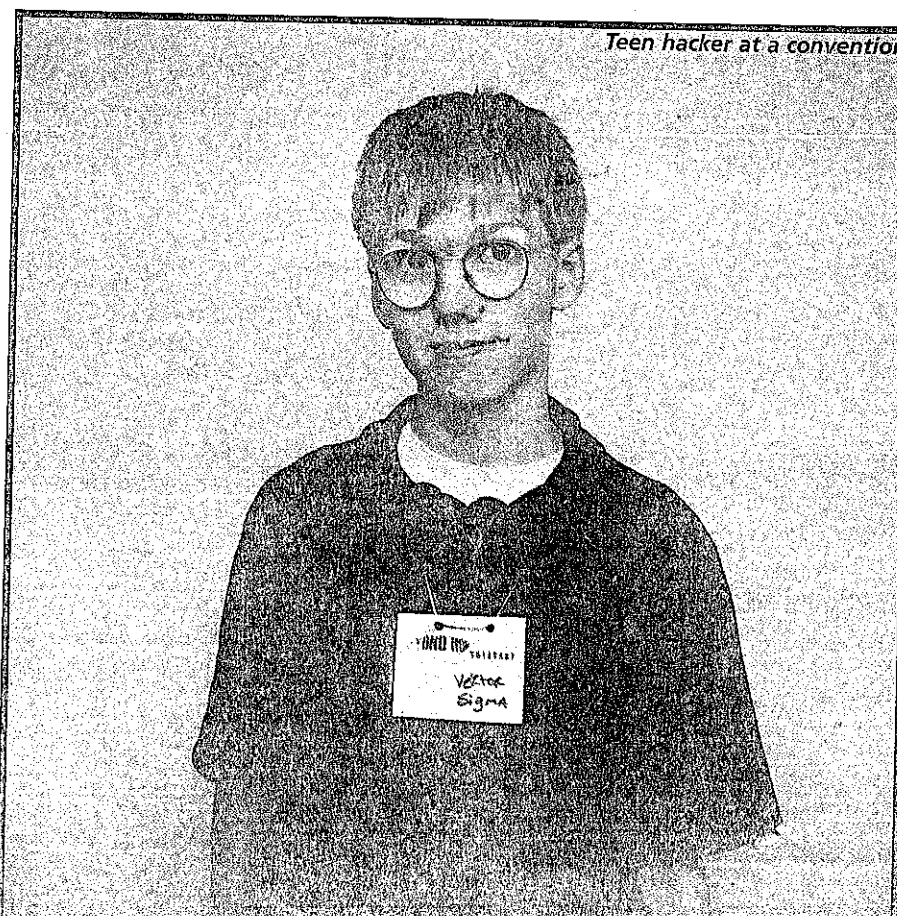
- 1 Jaschan should go to jail for up to 5 years. A D
- 2 If a virus writer posts a virus on a website but doesn't send it to anyone, it is his or her fault if someone uses it. A D
- 3 Hackers should be stopped whether they send the virus or not. A D
- 4 Hackers will always be a problem. A D

COMPUTER GLOSSARY

- 1 Worm: a virus that can get into your address book and files
- 2 re-boot: to start a computer
- 3 hard drive: the memory of the computer where documents are stored
- 4 JPEG: format for saving pictures digitally

Words

- ➔ Shut down (vb.) — prevented from working/turned off; ➔ staggering (adj.) — amazing, unbelievable (large); ➔ culprit (n.) — person who has committed a crime; ➔ lame (adj./informal) — pathetic, stupid, unoriginal, not clever; ➔ unleash (vb.) — allow something to escape; ➔ target (n.) — person/place that intended to be the victim of a crime or action; ➔ expose its flaws (phrase) — show its imperfections/bad things to everyone; ➔ geek (n.) — person who is obsessed with a particular hobby (often computers) that many people consider dull ➔ immunity — resistance



Teen hacker at a convention