

Introduction to Computer Security

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Abstract. The nineties set off the "information age". Companies, organisations, the whole society have become utterly dependent on computers for their proper functioning. Since information gathering, processing and distributing have become so important, it should be treasured as a strategic asset, and therefore, properly protected. In this paper, we first focus on the security policy. Then we examine the major threats that may compromise the security of information systems. Finally, we present an overview of security measures is presented.

1 Introduction

The nineties set off the "information age". Companies, organisations, the whole society have become utterly dependent on computers for their proper functioning. However, although the efficiency has improved rapidly, in many organisations, the condition of computer security has never been so poor. Actually, it is worsening, and this for several reasons.

- During the last decade, the information technology has evolved very fast. Security was not an issue in the beginning, and has never been able to keep pace.
- At first, computers were used in invoicing and wages administration. Later on, they were involved in stock management, EDI, . . . Nowadays, they are a necessary tool for strategic decisions.
- Networking is booming. The central mainframe has been replaced by a LAN of PCs or workstations. Because of the pressure of the market, these LANs are connected to the Internet or the public telephone network.
- The *democratization* of information technology moved the computers out of the computing centre into the work place.

One aspect of democratization, the **lowering of thresholds**, needs some elaboration. Although security incidents are often (wrongly) associated with break-ins by hackers or criminal organisations, most incidents are caused by **insiders** (employees of the organization, maintenance people, . . .). (See also tab. 1.) This is not surprising, since insiders have less hurdles to take and possess inside information. Moreover, a computerized office is an attractive target for fraud:

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Table of Contents Introduction To Computer Security

1. Understanding the eBook Introduction To Computer Security
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Introduction To Computer Security
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Introduction To Computer Security
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Introduction To Computer Security
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Introduction To Computer Security
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Introduction To Computer Security User Reviews and Ratings

- Introduction To Computer Security and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Introduction To Computer Security Free and Paid eBooks
 - Introduction To Computer Security Public Domain eBooks
 - Introduction To Computer Security eBook Subscription Services
 - Introduction To Computer Security Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Introduction To Computer Security eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Introduction To Computer Security Compatibility with Devices
 - Introduction To Computer Security Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Introduction To Computer Security
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Introduction To Computer Security
 - Interactive Elements Introduction To Computer Security
- 8. Staying Engaged with Introduction To Computer Security
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Introduction To Computer Security
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Introduction To Computer Security
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Introduction To Computer Security
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Introduction To Computer Security
 - Setting Reading Goals Introduction To Computer Security
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Introduction To Computer Security
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Introduction To Computer Security
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources

13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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