

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 The central mainframe has been replaced by a LAN of PCs or workstations.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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