



SOCIAL-ENGINEER

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Case Study: When Phishing Gets Real, And Why Sparring Isn't Optional

Phishing attacks aren't going away. In fact, they're getting more personal, more believable, and more effective. The question isn't "if" anymore—it's when your organization will be tested. And when that moment comes, your firewall won't be the target.

Your people will.

One report states there was a 50% increase in phishing in 2024, and a 70% increase in credential theft via phishing. And phishing is still the #1 method used by threat actors to gain entry into an organization or to install ransomware.

That's exactly what happened to one organization who thought they were doing everything right. They had phishing training. They sent emails regularly. They tracked metrics. They thought they had good follow up training.

But they weren't getting better.

What Was Wrong?

Despite years of effort, their employees still clicked. Still entered data. Still froze when the message looked too real. Why?

Because phishing defense isn't just about spotting typos or suspicious links. It's about training people to think under pressure, to respond under stress, and to act in a way that protects, not compromises, the organization.

Just like in martial arts, knowing a technique on paper doesn't mean you can use it in a fight. Just like at the gym, wishing you can bench 315 on day 1, doesn't mean you will be able to.

The Behavioral Shift

When we stepped in, we didn't throw out their tools. We added context. We added coaching. And we made every simulation a learning opportunity, not a pop quiz. We didn't just track who clicked.



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We tracked:

- Who reported
- Who improved
- Who clicked again
- And why

We built a program that mimicked the real world. Tailored lures. Internal spoofing. Emotional pretexting. We create levels so people can graduate, just like you would in the dojo or gym. And we treated every result as a chance to build reflex, not shame failure.

We used scientific principles in our pretexts, which gave us actionable data to use in training. We ditched those, scientifically proven, useless CBT's and moved to a more actionable, easier to consume training methodology. And we ensured that the program was from the top down, everyone got phished every month, from the CEO to the brand-new hire.

This was no small feat, this company had over 250,000 employees.

But it worked!

The Data Speaks for Itself

Here's what happened after 2 years in the Social-Engineer Phishing Simulation (SEPS):

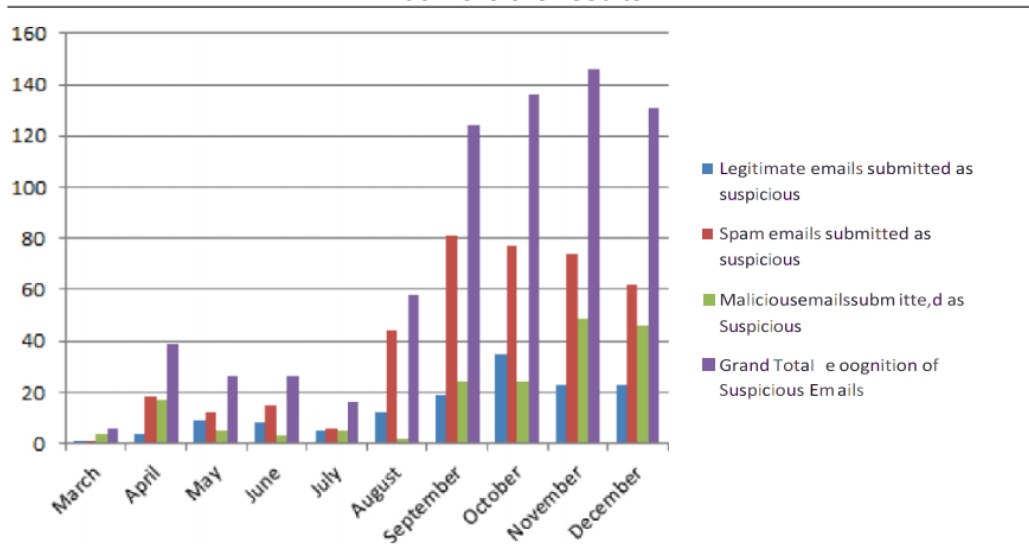
- Click rates dropped by over 80 percent
- Reporting rates more than quadrupled
- Employee-to-IT dialogue increased
- Malware and reimaging incidents plummeted – by a staggering 78%
- Drive-by downloads and adware dropped sharply

This wasn't theory. It was a measurable change in real-world behavior.

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What were the results?



More than a 370% increase in recognizing phishing emails.

Defense Is a Human Game

Businesses spend hundreds of thousands, to millions of dollars on intrusion detection, firewalls, and endpoint controls. But one convincing phishing email can compromise everything, without the attacker ever breaching a firewall.

A good phishing attack doesn't need exploits. It needs trust. And if your employees aren't trained to recognize it, they'll hand it over willingly. And more importantly, they need to be trained how to report if they take an action they shouldn't.

The proper phishing model isn't about fear. It's about preparation.

We don't shame mistakes. We train through them. Our approach reflects how humans actually learn: with relevance, repetition, and reflection. And that's how we build a security culture that lasts.

What This Means for You

If your people are part of your infrastructure, they deserve the same investment as your firewalls. Because in the moment of attack, it's not policy that protects, it's practice.

Train the way you fight. And your people will fight the way they were trained.