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July 2008 - THINK YOU CAN'T BE HACKED? THEN YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Think You're Safe From Hackers? Then You Don't Know Jack

Dennis Gaskill of BoogieJack.com Shares His Story

BoogieJack.com, a webmaster resource site since 1997, plunged from the top of search engine rankings to not being found, all within a few short weeks. Any web site is a potential target...and yours could be next.

The Early Warning

The first sign that something was wrong was a steady decline in sales. However, as an 11-year veteran of e-commerce, I was used to seeing sales slow down in the weeks leading up to the tax filing deadline. I chalked up the falling sales to that and consumer concern over rising oil prices and the economy in general.

After a few more weeks of further declining sales, it became obvious something more than short-term sales fluctuations was happening. I checked my site stats and was shocked at the downturn in web site traffic. What I first thought was strictly a loss of sales was instead a drastic loss of traffic from the major search engines. I went to Google to search for my site using keywords and phrases for which it has traditionally ranked on the first page or two, but my site had seemingly disappeared. I clicked down into the search results for 50 pages without finding my site for any of my top keywords.

The First Clue

Concerned that my site was somehow no longer listed with the major search engines, I next searched for pages within my domain only. The first couple of pages brought results, so I knew my site was still indexed, but why had it fallen completely out of search results for keywords I usually dominated?

After clicking a couple of pages deep into the search results, I started seeing pages listed for my site that I knew I had not created. As I kept going, hundreds of pages not of my own making turned up. When I clicked the links for these pages to see if they were really on my site, all I got were 404 errors (file not found).

After discovering this, I logged into to my site via FTP to look for these specific pages, but they weren't there. I did make an important discovery, though. Hidden in a directory I seldom worked with, I found a strange file—a PHP script I didn't place there.

The Hacker's Script

In studying the PHP script, it appeared it was supposed to redirect people who clicked the bogus links in search engines to a Chinese web site, but apparently the script had an error in it so, to the search engines, all the bogus links ended up being non-existent pages on my site.

The links were for all kinds of things: shoes, porn, celebrities, MP3 downloads, pharmaceuticals, jewelry, sports equipment, and hundreds of

other topics unrelated to my site. But where were these links coming from?

A Second Discovery

After looking in all my directories, I next checked the source code of a few pages, which lead to a new discovery. All of the bogus search engine links were scattered throughout most of my pages, but they were placed after the closing HTML tags so they weren't visible on the web page if you were viewing my site in a browser. Unfortunately, the search engines picked them up anyway. It seems obvious the hacker was trying to siphon traffic from my site. It's also possible the hacker was trying to boost his or her own site's popularity.

What the Search Engines Saw

To the search engines, my site had about 300 good pages and about 6,000 broken pages. Search engines penalize sites with too much link rot, and you can't blame them. Broken links in their search returns reduces the quality of their product. With all that link rot on my site, its search engine rankings were effectively destroyed.

To read the rest of Dennis' cautionary tale, and learn how to prevent a similar fate, download your FREE COPY of the full report by visiting the link below:

<http://www.createthedream.net/bonus/HackerReport.pdf>