



“Hackers Paradise,” The Fantasy Island of Cyber Deception, Threats, and Nightmares

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Legislative IS Auditor
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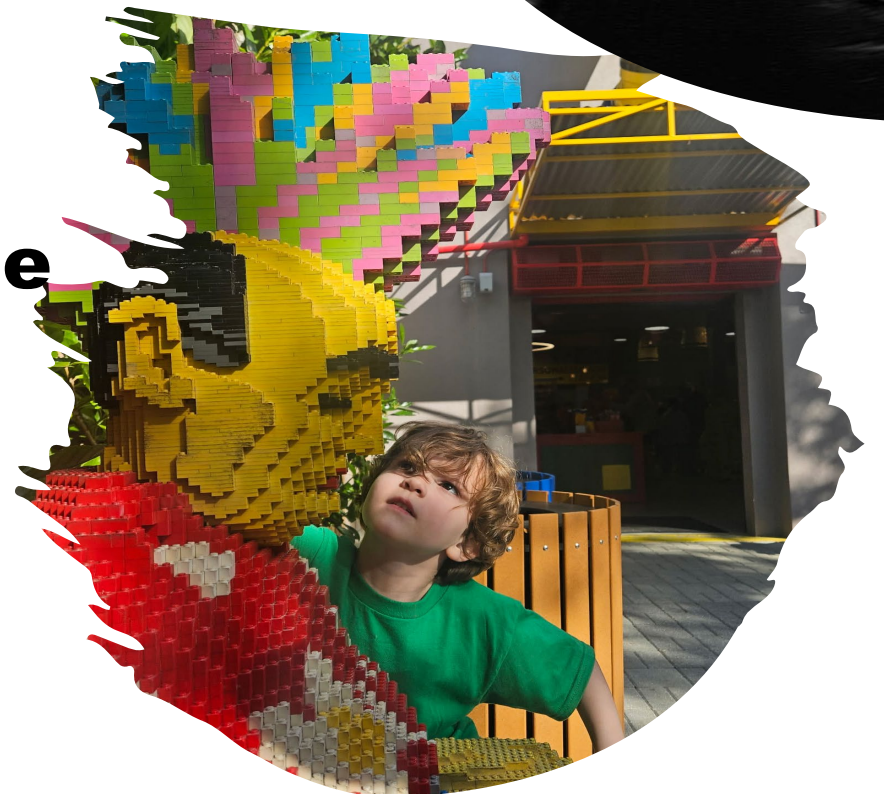
May 9, 2025

TENNESSEE COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY





Meet My People



About Us



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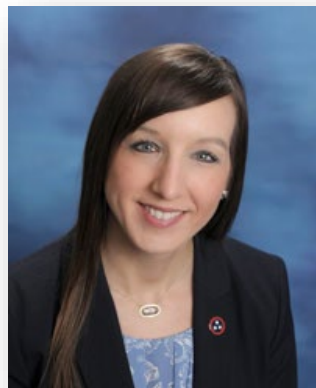


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Elisha Crowell



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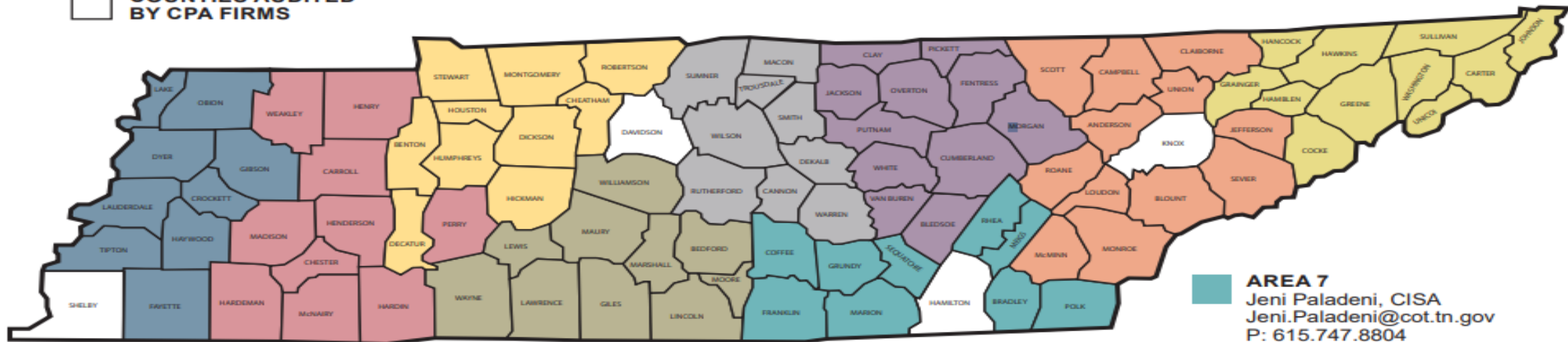
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DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed during this presentation are my own. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, his representatives, or the Tennessee Department of Audit.

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Goals of Presentation-

Don't be a tourist in "Hacker's Paradise."
"Hacker's Paradise is Not Paradise!"

- I. Define and Compare Hacker's Paradise/Fantasy Island
- II. Define Cybersecurity
- III. Responsibility

Who is at Risk?

III. Cyber Threats/Nightmares

- a. Social Engineering
- b. Phishing/Smishing/Vishing.
- c. Business Email Compromise-BEC
- d. Ransomware/Malware
- d. Weak Passwords

. IV. Rules of Protection

- a. Cybersecurity Training
- b. Create Strong Passwords
- c. Multifactor Authentication

V. Conclusion/Questions



HACKER'S PARADISE

THE FANTASY ISLAND OF CYBER
DECEPTION, THREATS, AND NIGHTMARES



Hacker's Paradise is NOT Paradise!

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Fantasy Island vs. Hacker's Paradise

Don't Be a Tourist
In
Hacker's Paradise.

Feature	Fantasy Island	Hacker's Paradise
Welcome Message	"Your dreams come true here."	"Your worst digital nightmares start here."
Main Attraction	Magical wish fulfillment.	Exploiting your digital desires (free Wi-Fi, too-good-to-be-true deals).
Guests	Tourists looking for fantasy experiences.	Hackers, scammers, cybercriminals looking for low-hanging fruit.
Hotel Wi-Fi	Just convenient.	Public and unsecured—ripe for man-in-the-middle attacks .
Key Souvenirs	Photos, memories.	User credentials, bank logins, sensitive emails.
Tour Guides	Charming and helpful.	Social engineers posing as tech support, HR, or even friends.
Entertainment	Adventure, romance, and mystery.	Phishing emails, vishing calls, smishing texts all disguised as urgent or enticing.
Theme Nights	Masquerade Ball.	BEC Attacks (Business Email Compromise) where hackers pretend to be your boss.
Hidden Traps	Cursed relics or strange island magic.	Weak passwords, unpatched IoT devices, and default router settings.
Natural Disasters	Sudden tropical storms.	Ransomware attacks that lock up your files and demand Bitcoin.
Exit Plan	Return flight home.	No easy way out without backups, cyber hygiene, and incident response plans.

“Hacker’s Paradise”

NOT A VACATION HAVEN
Paradise is NOT Paradise!
Don’t be a tourist.

It is an environment with poor cybersecurity practices or a lack of awareness.

-
- Hackers can enjoy easy access.
 - Security holes are like open beach bars.
 - Every system is a potential treasure chest.
 - The only waves are waves of data being stolen.



WHAT DO THESE HAVE IN COMMON?



City of Knoxville
Knoxville Police & Fire
Department
Coffee County Sheriff's
Office.
Spring Hill City & 911
Maury County 911
Murfreesboro Police & Fire
Department
Rutherford County

Montgomery County
Government
City of Collierville
Sevier County
City of Springfield
Anderson County
Pellissippi State
Community College
Maury County Public
School District
Jefferson County Schools



I. DEFINE CYBERSECURITY

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What is Cybersecurity?

According to CISA.gov:

Cybersecurity is the art of protecting networks, devices, and data from unauthorized access or criminal use and the practice of ensuring confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information.

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II. RESPONSIBILITY

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SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

KEEP THE ISLAND SAFE!!!

WEAKEST LINK



**Human error accounts for 95 %
of all cybersecurity breaches.
The human element is the weakest
link in cybersecurity.**

Source: IBM Study

Who is at risk of a cyber-attack?





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“If we think about cybercrime the way we think about the GDP of countries, it would be the third largest economy in the world after the U.S. and China.”

Cisco CEO
Chuck Robbins

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT-TOP COUNTRIES 2024

1. United States \$25.43 trillion

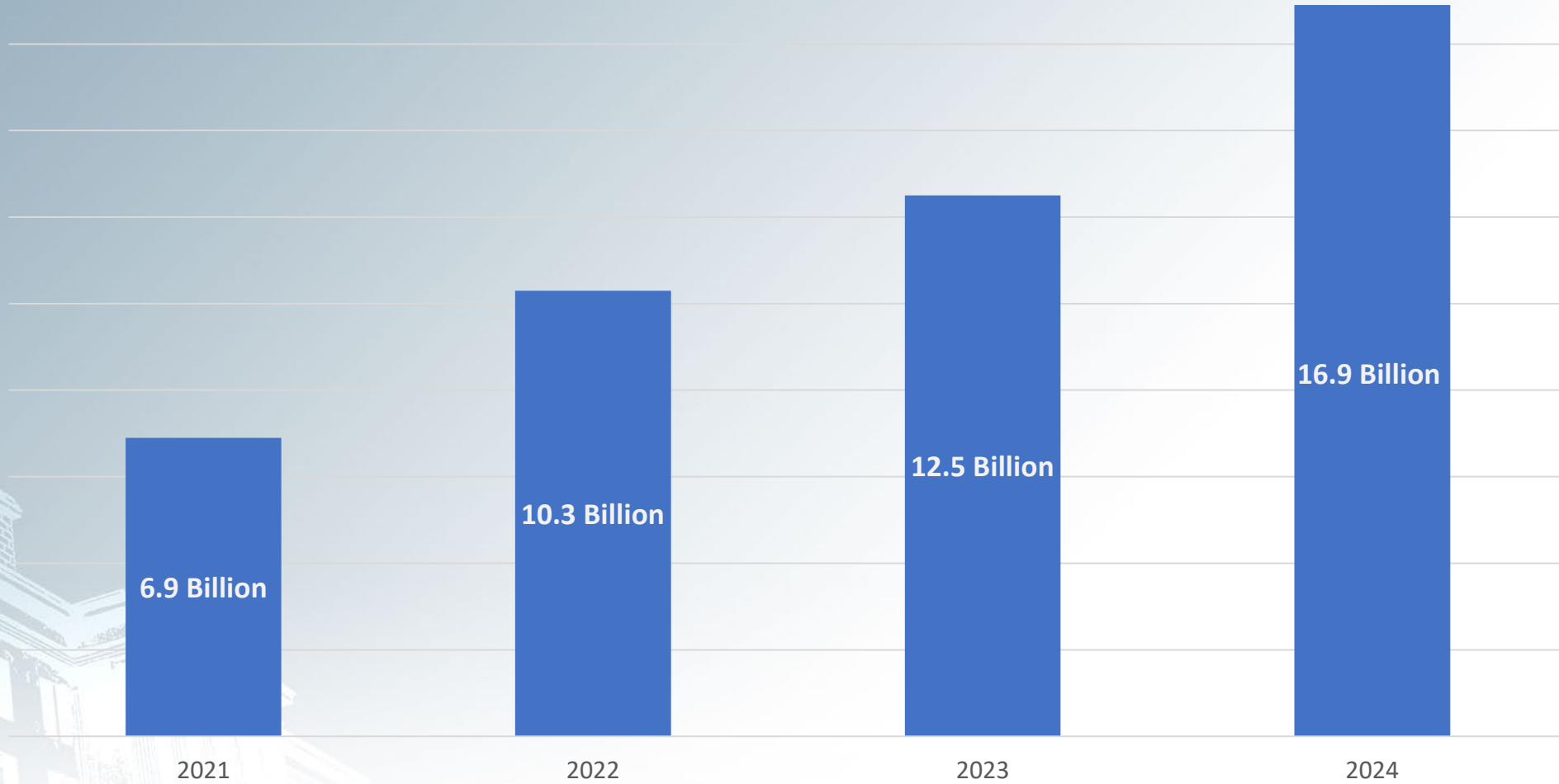
2. China \$14.72 trillion

3. Cybercrimes \$8 trillion-2023
(Estimated to be \$9.5 trillion 2024)

4. Japan \$4.25 trillion

5. Germany \$3.85 trillion

Losses Over the Last 5 Years



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Cyber Deception/ Threats/Nightmares

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How People Think They Get Hacked!



SOCIAL ENGINEERING

A type of cyber attack that exploits human nature to manipulate people for information

WHY IT WORKS:

- Plays on emotions like fear or greed
- Exploits our tendency to be helpful
- Impersonates trusted people or companies

DEFENSES:

- Be wary of unusual requests
- Verify identities before sharing
- Don't give in to high-pressure tactics
- Limit personal info shared online
- Educate and train employees

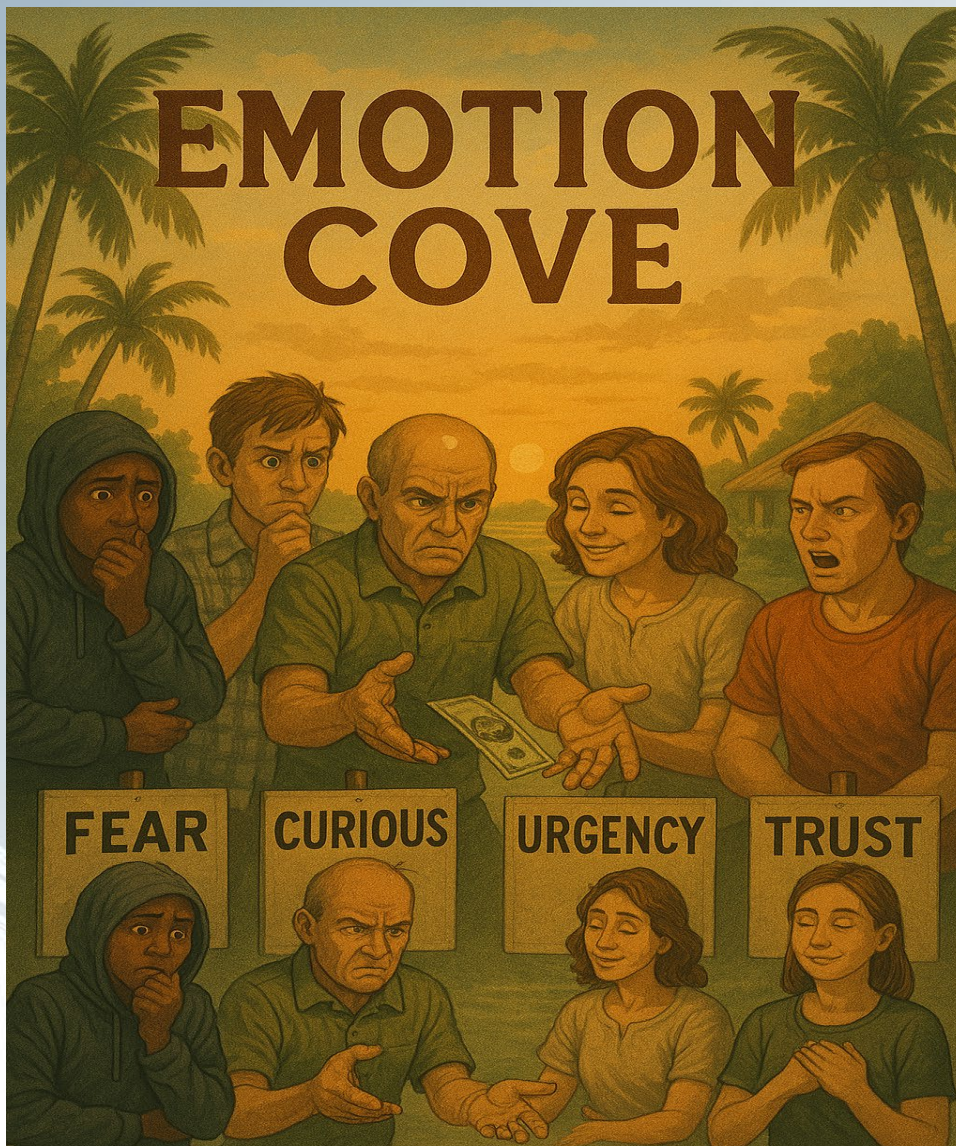
Educate and train employees



How People Really
Get Hacked!

Social Engineering-(in the context of information security) the use of deception to manipulate individuals into divulging confidential or personal information that may be used for fraudulent purposes.

<https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>



Social Engineering takes advantage of human behaviors using psychological manipulation. The user may respond due to:

- **Fear**
- **Curiosity**
- **Greed**
- **Helpfulness**
- **Urgency**
- **Trust**

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PHISHING AND BUSINESS EMAIL COMPROMISE

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Phishing

A technique for attempting to acquire sensitive information such as bank account numbers, through fraudulent solicitation in an email or on a website, in which the perpetrator masquerades as a legitimate business or reputable person.

Definition source: csrc.nist.gov



What is Phishing and What are they Phishing For?

PHISHING



fraudulent
emails

SMISHING



fraudulent
text messages

VISHING



fraudulent
phone calls

Phishing Email

-----Original Message-----

From: Twyla Pratt <multiplimpio@multilimio.com.mx>

To: Elisha Crowell <elisha.crowell@cot.tn.gov>

Sent: Tue, Aug 29, 2021| 11:07 am

Subject: AGA West TN Chapter

Dear friend,

Called you a few times without success but decided to reach you by email. Are you available?
I need to know the status of the attach invoice. Its way past due and the vendor is requesting
immediate payment. If not paid yet it can be paid online at this [website](#).

Yours Truly,

Twyla

Definition: Business Email Compromise

A type of cybercrime in which the attacker uses email to trick someone into sharing sensitive and confidential information or sending funds to them through various means, including wire transfers, gift cards, or other means of paying fake invoices. It is an exploitation of our email by impersonating a trusted party.

BEC: THE SMOOTH-TALKING PIRATE OF HACKER'S PARADISE

What is BEC? Business Email Compromise is a type of cyberattack where a hacker impersonates a trusted figure—like a CEO, vendor, or coworker—via email to trick employees

Why it's a Favorite in Hacker's Paradise:

- Fake bosses requesting wire transfers from a tiki bar
- No malware or brute force
- Just pure deception

Common BEC Red Flags

- 'Are you available?' emails
- Spoofed domains
- Urgent financial requests

How to Escape the Island Trap

- Train your team
- Use MFA



Phishing vs. BEC



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**In 2022 BEC
accounted for
50 percent
of social
engineering
tactics**

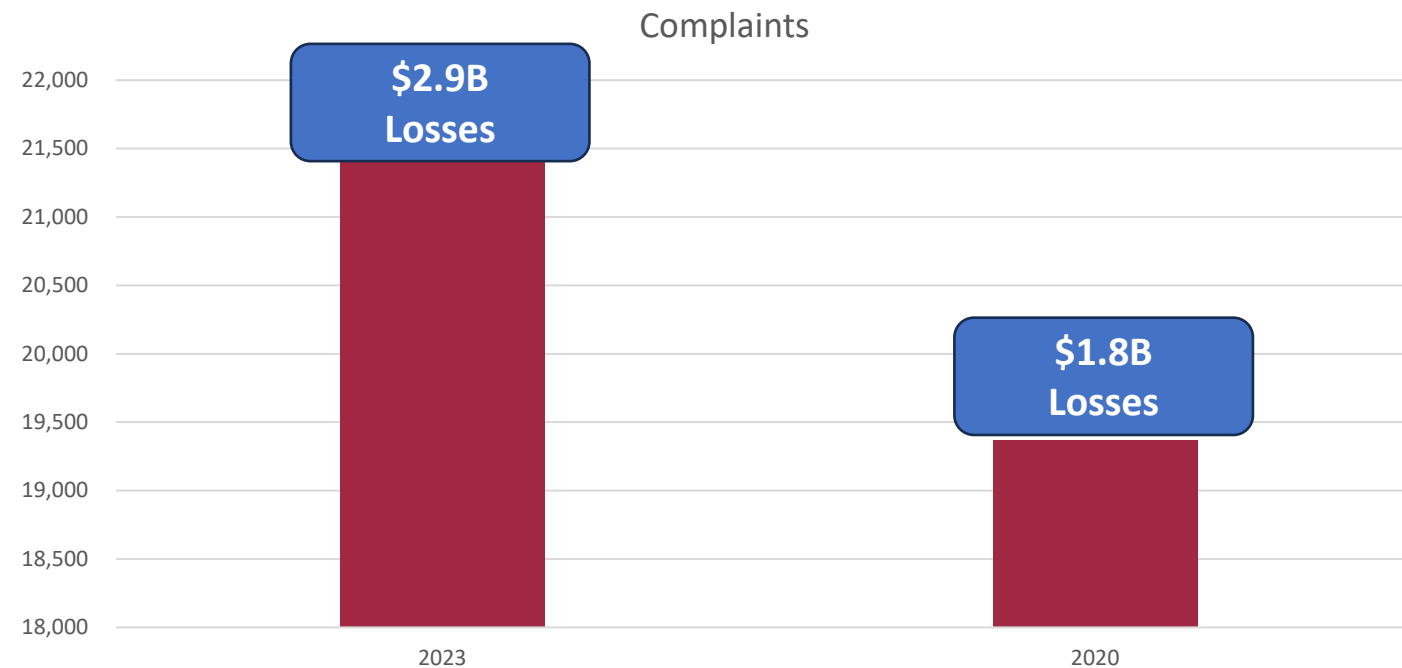
**In 2023 BEC
accounted for
99 percent
of reported
email-based threats**

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BEC Complaints and Losses



TYPES OF BEC ATTACKS



**EXECUTIVE
IMPERSONATION**



**ATTORNEY
IMPERSONATION**



**ACCOUNT
COMPROMISE**



**VENDOR
EMAIL COMPROMISE**

The Great Email Heist: A BEC Tale from Paradise



Scene 1: The Disguised
Castaway



Scene 2: Deceptive
Message from 'the boss.'



Scene 3: The Vanishing
Message in a bottle



Scene 4: The Vanishing
Treasure

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HOW BEC WORKS



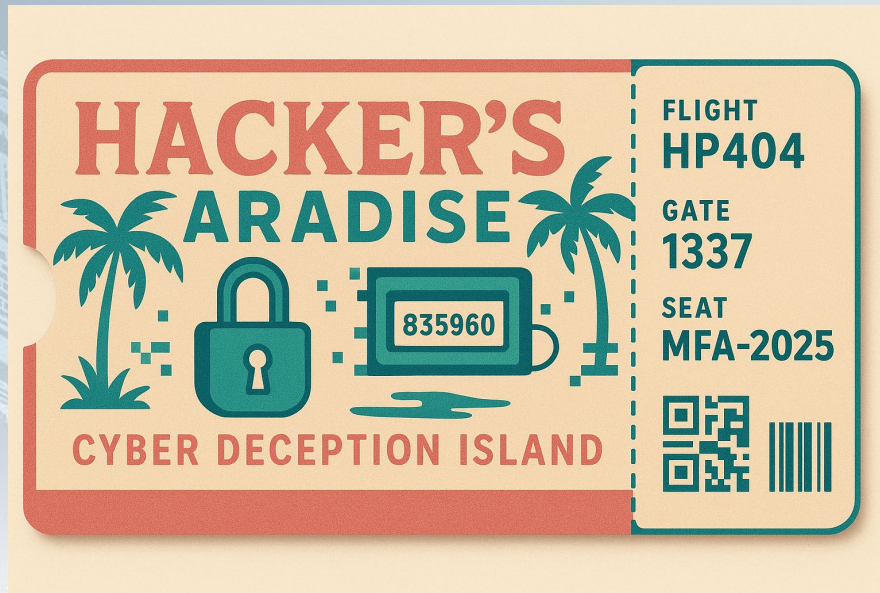
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Real Life Examples of BEC Attacks

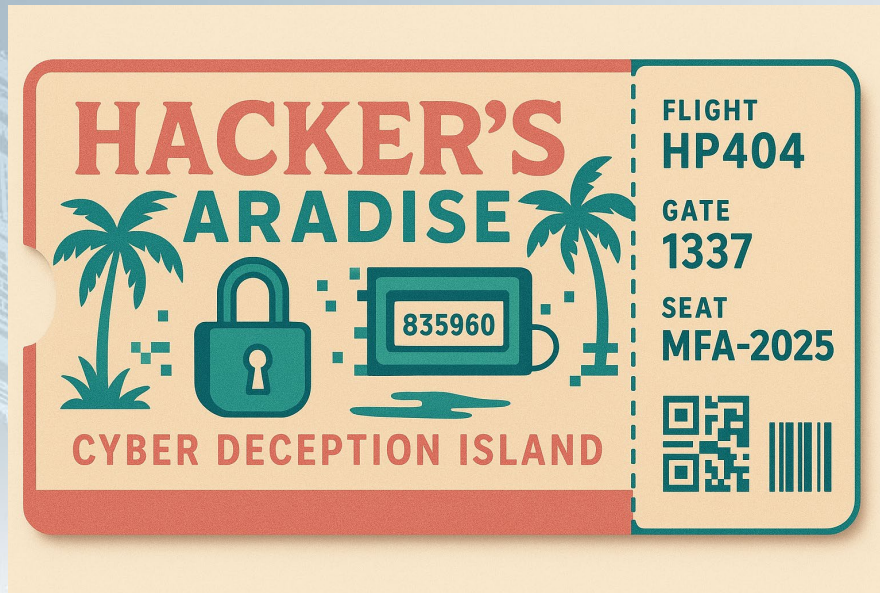


BEC Attacks



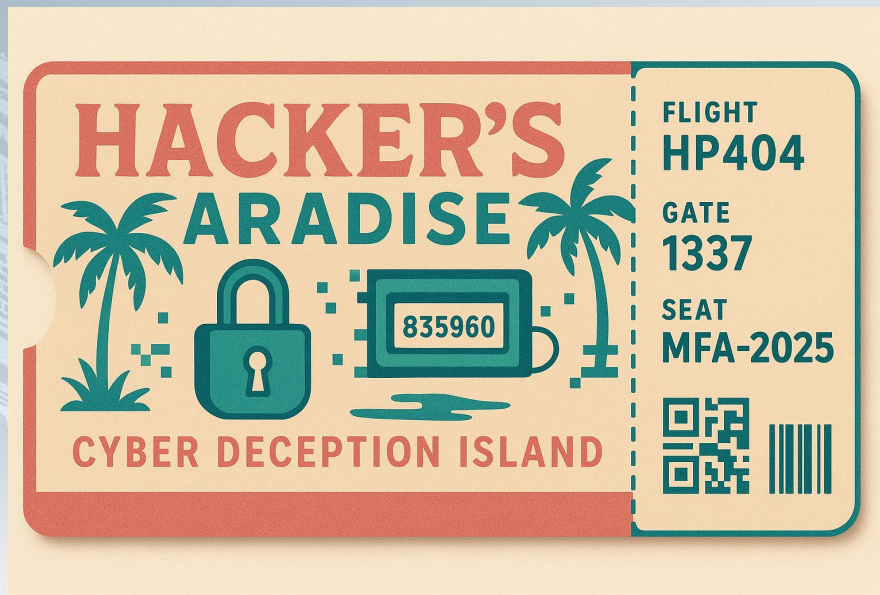
In 2018, the city of Atlanta, Georgia experienced a ransomware attack that severely disrupted municipal services. The ransomware encrypted critical files across the city's network, forcing systems offline and leading to significant recovery efforts. The attack, which did not involve a ransom payment, resulted in an estimated financial loss of around \$17 million due to recovery costs and operational downtime.

BEC Attacks



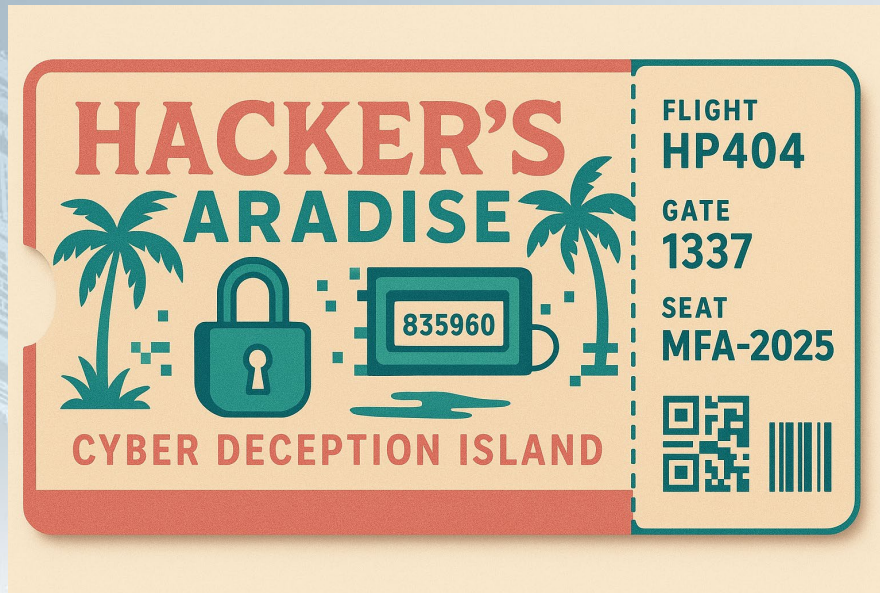
Atlanta-Children's Hospital -CFO was impersonated convinces the A/P dept. to switch bank on file and send \$3.6 million dollars.

BEC Attacks



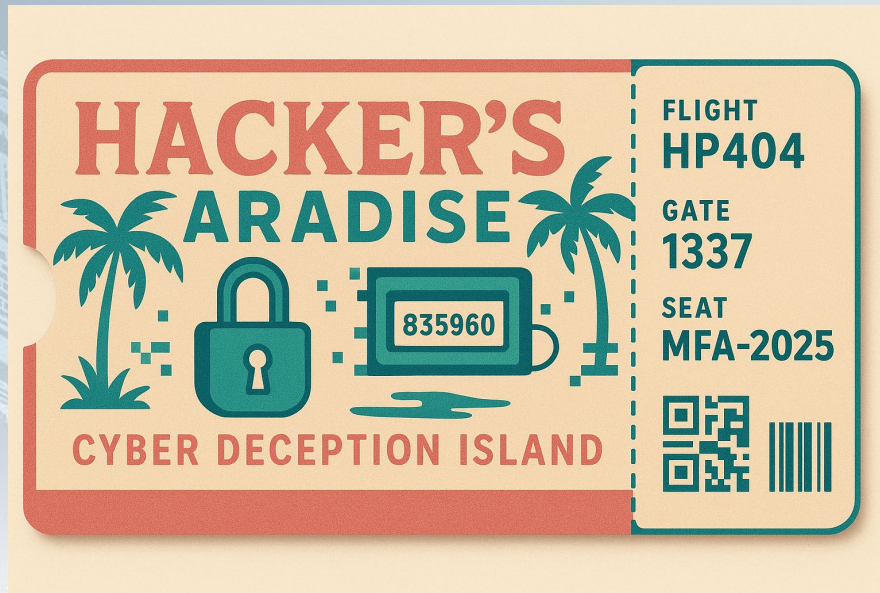
Eagle Mountain City, Utah- Vendor emails that appeared to be legitimate were sent to the city. Instructions were changed on the ACH payment, and \$1.13 million dollars were sent to a fraudulent account. Account compromise for vendor and a VEC for the city.

BEC Attacks



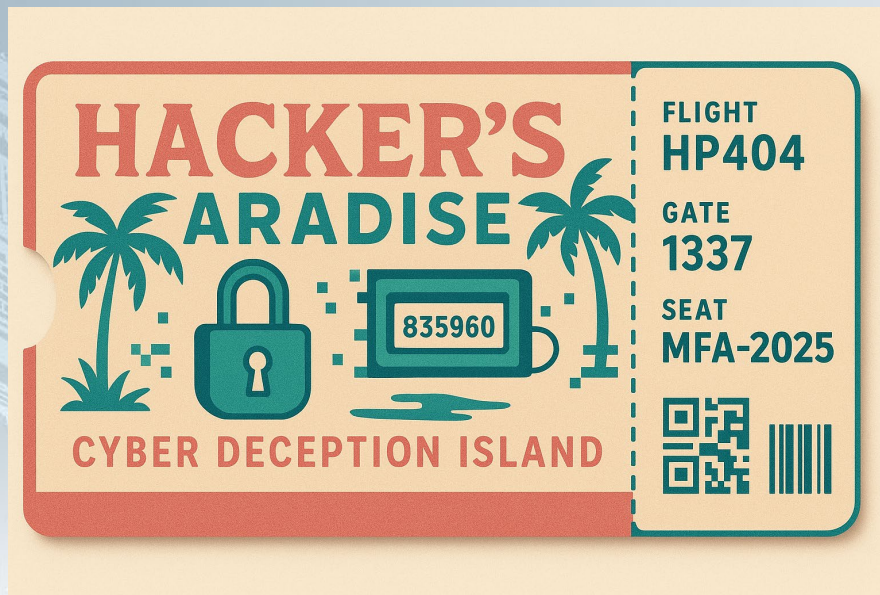
Toyota-3rd party hacker posed as a business partner-Subsidiary emails were sent to the accounting dept. asking them to send funds to a specific bank account or that production would be stopped. This was an account compromise of the business partner and a VEC compromise for Toyota.

BEC Attacks



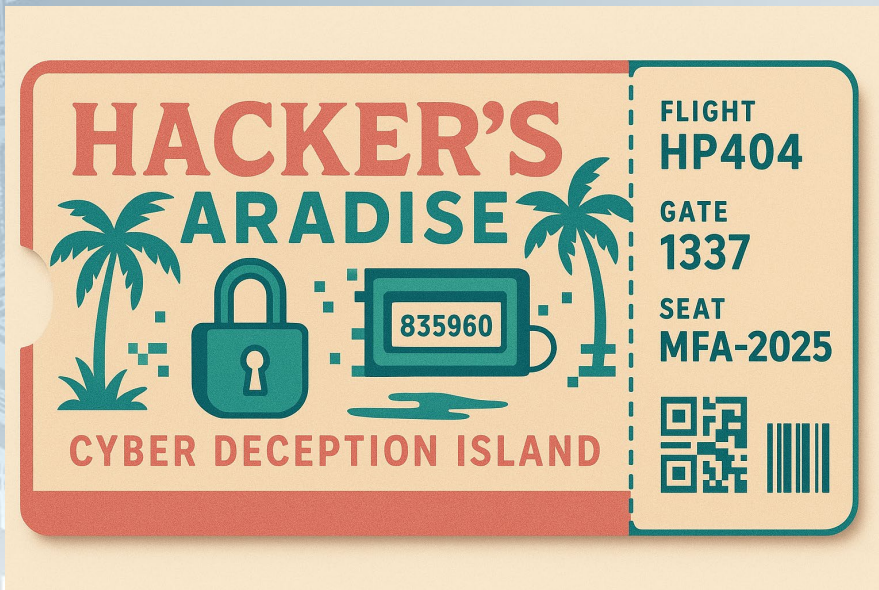
City of Lexington, KY-hacker claims to be from Community Action Council which is a local housing group. They asked to update their account information. 4 million dollars was sent.

BEC Attacks



In 2020, Rutherford County in Tennessee experienced a BEC attack where scammers gained access to email accounts of county employees. They used this access to impersonate officials and orchestrate fraudulent wire transfers. The attack led to significant financial losses of \$2.3 millions for the county.

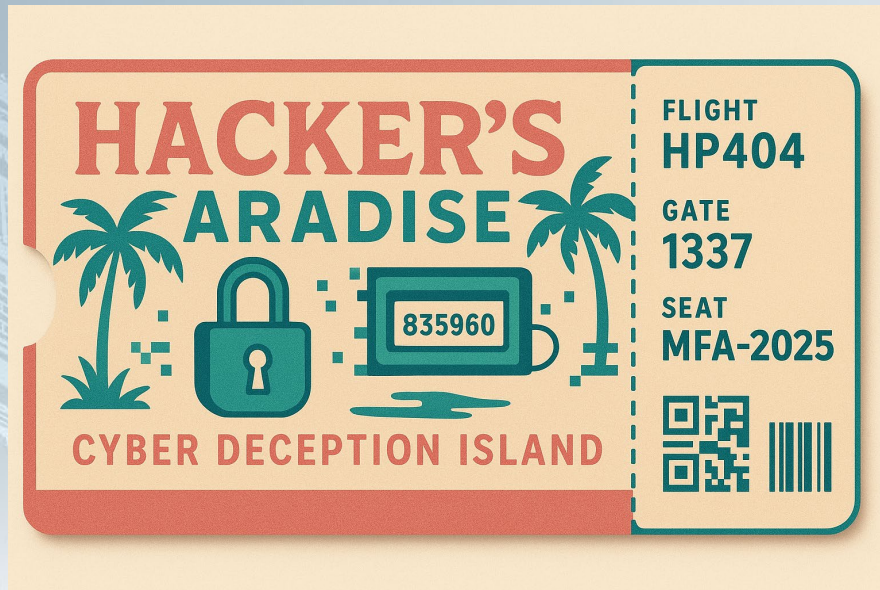
BEC Attacks



In 2021, the City of Jackson experienced a BEC attack where attackers managed to intercept and alter email communications related to a financial transaction. As a result, they redirected funds intended for a legitimate payment into their own accounts.

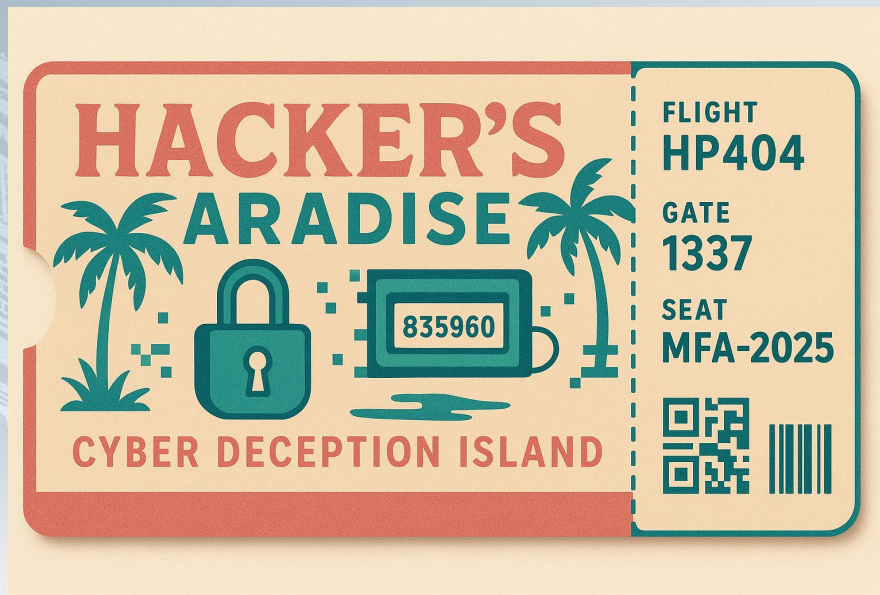
The city of Jackson suffered a loss of approximately \$1.5 million due to this attack.

BEC Attacks



In 2019, the City of Memphis in Tennessee experienced a BEC attack where attackers targeted the city's finance department by compromising email accounts and using them to impersonate officials. This led to fraudulent wire transfers, resulting in approximately \$3.2 million in losses.

BEC Attacks



In 2019, the city of New Bedford, Massachusetts experienced a BEC attack where attackers used a fake invoice scheme to defraud the city. As a result, the city lost approximately \$3.5 million.



**Sense of
Urgency**

**Unrecognized
Email
Addresses**

**Unexpected
Email**

**Spelling
and Grammar
Mistakes**

**Unfamiliar
Tone or
Language**

**Requests
for Payment**

**Request for
Sensitive
Information**

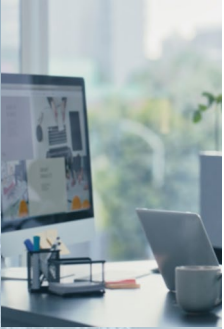
**Fictitious
Links**

Real-World Example

> On Friday, April 1, 2022, 10:38:55 AM CDT, Donna Craig
> <clerkofficeil1@gmail.com> wrote:
>
> Randi
> I 'll need you to process a payment for me today via ACH/WIRE
> TRANSFER/CHECK MAILING. For the
> Administrative networking web-hosting activity expense.
>
> Get back to me if you can get this done, so i can forward the payment
> details to you.
>
> Regards
> Donna

On 4/1/22, Randi French <randifrench@yahoo.com> wrote:
> Yes ma'am I sure can :)
> Thank you, Randi French Henry County Trustee

Ho



From: Donna Craig (clerkofficeil1@gmail.com)

To: randifrench@yahoo.com

Date: Friday, April 1, 2022, 11:05 AM CDT

Randi

initiate a an outgoing wire transfer to the account details below:

ACCOUNT HOLDER: CONSTANCE LYON

BANK NAME: M&T BANK

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 9888615268

ROUTING NUMBER: 031302955

AMOUNT :\$4,780.00

BANK ADDRESS : 550 Suburban Dr, Newark, 19711

Payment for Administrative Networking web-hosting activity service expenses

Get back to me with the payment confirmation slip once you are done making the payment.

Regards
Donna

TENNESSEE



-----Original Message-----

From: Tammy Steele <multilimpio@multilimpio.com.mx>

To: Dmyers2382 <Dmyers2382@aol.com>

Sent: Tue, Aug 29, 2017 11:07 am

Subject: Invoice number 8662549 second Notification

Good day First Utility District of Tipton County 2275,

Called you a few times without success. Decided to reach you by email. I need to know the status of this invoice below, it's way past due.

<http://funfrance.fr/Invoice-266141-reminder/>

Yours Truly,
Tammy Steele

REIMBURSEMENT



Jennifer M Garoutte <p2345678967778@gmail.com>

To Penny Austin



1:11 PM

Retention Policy COT Inbox (6 months)

Expires 4/4/2020

We removed extra line breaks from this message.

--

Hi Penny

Are you unoccupied to grab me something? i actually need you to make provision for gift cards for me at any local stores around. Let me know when you are ready for details . I would reimburse you when am through.

Thanks

Jennifer M.

TENNESSEE COMPTROLLER Sent from my Iphone



March 7, 2024

FBI: Scammers Stole \$160 Million From Tennesseans in 2023

KNOXVILLE, TN—Tennessee residents lost more than \$160 million to Internet scammers last year, according to a new report released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The report highlights critical vulnerabilities and underscores the imperative for heightened cybersecurity measures in the Volunteer State.

In 2023, Tennessee ranked 31st in the country, with residents lodging a total of 8,484 complaints with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), reporting losses amounting to \$161,195,036. These figures underscore the devastating impact cybercrime has on individuals and businesses statewide.

"We've noticed a steady stream of cybercrime here in Tennessee. This means we all need to be extra careful and take action to stay safe online," said Joseph Carrico, special agent in charge of the FBI's Knoxville Field Office. "Cybercriminals are always coming up with new tricks to scam people, whether you're a regular person or a big company. So, it's really important for everyone in Tennessee to pay attention and make sure we're protecting ourselves online."

Tech support scams, investment fraud, and business e-mail compromise (BEC) emerge as the leading categories for losses in Tennessee. Particularly alarming is the heightened risk faced by individuals over 60, who are most susceptible to falling victim to these cyber scams.

Nationwide, in 2023, the IC3 recorded a staggering 880,418 complaints, indicating a substantial rise in cybercrime activities across the nation. The total losses incurred from these incidents exceeded a staggering \$12.5 billion, underscoring the severity of the cyber threat landscape.

Notably, this figure represents a significant increase compared to the average number of complaints received over the past five years. California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Ohio reported the highest number of victims, while California, Texas, and Florida also topped the list in terms of financial losses.

"Protecting yourself online is crucial. Make sure to use strong, unique passwords for your accounts, and be cautious about clicking on links or opening attachments in e-mails from unfamiliar sources," said Jason Jarnagin, supervisory special agent leading the FBI's cybercrime squad in Knoxville. "Keep your computer's software up to date and consider using antivirus software. And most importantly, if something seems suspicious or too good to be true, trust your gut and double-check before sharing personal information or sending money."

The FBI remains committed to working closely with local law enforcement agencies and community partners to mitigate risks and protect Tennesseans against cyber attacks. If your business is the victim of a cyber attack, contact your local FBI office immediately for assistance.

For more information on the 2023 Internet Crime Report and resources for cybersecurity, visit the IC3 website at www.ic3.gov.

Impact of Business Email Compromise



**Financial Loss
from theft**

**Reputational
Damage**
Lack of public trust



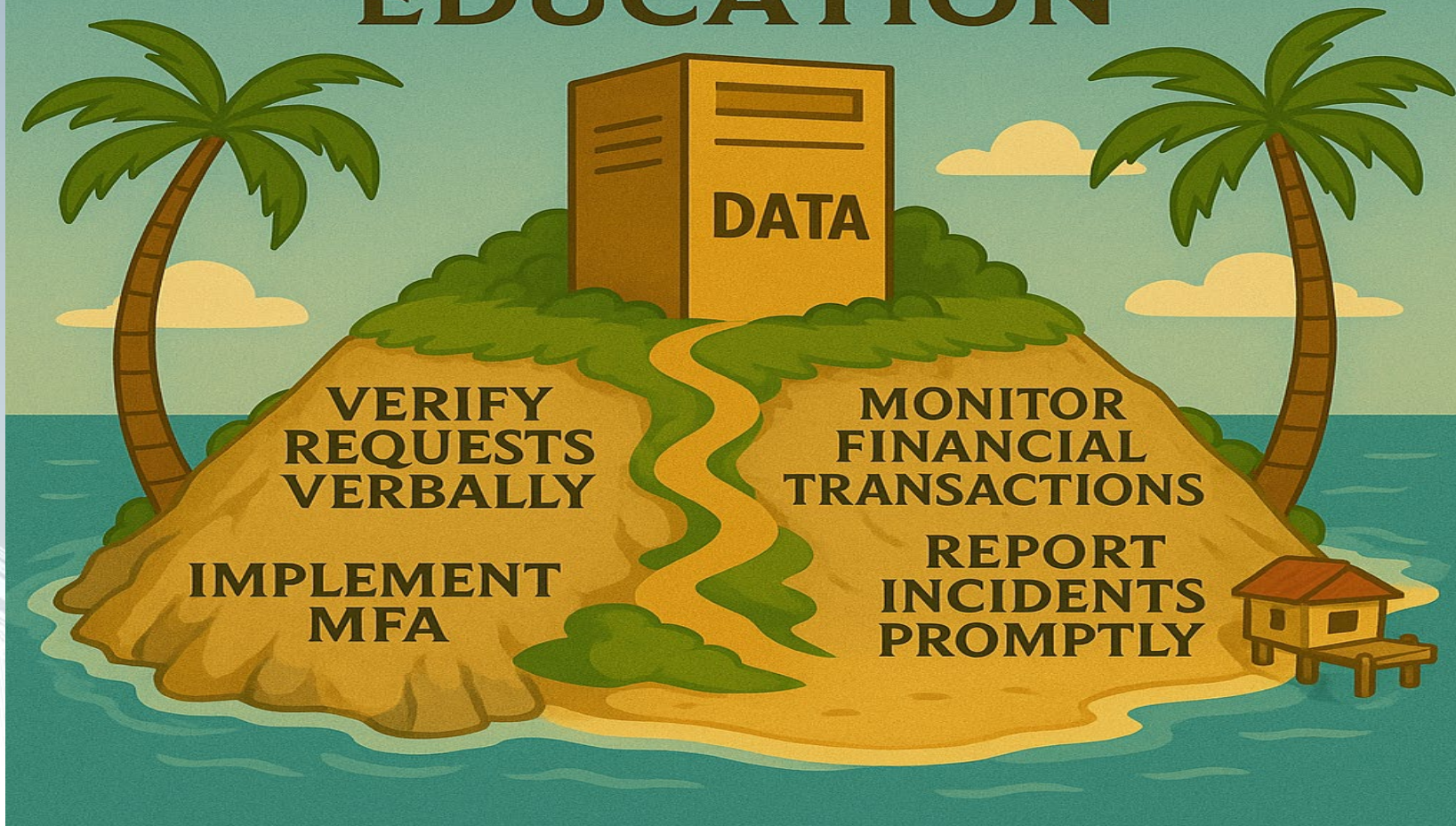
**Legal and Regulatory
Penalties and Fines**
for non-compliance



**Operational
Disruptions**
Costs related to
investigation and
remediation



CYBERSECURITY EDUCATION



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Ransomware and Malware

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Ransomware/Malware Defined

Malware is malicious software.

Ransomware is a type of malicious software that is a form of high-tech extortion where the malicious software hijacks computer systems and holds them hostage until the victim pays a ransom.





RANSOMWARE AND MALWARE CLICK! CLICK!

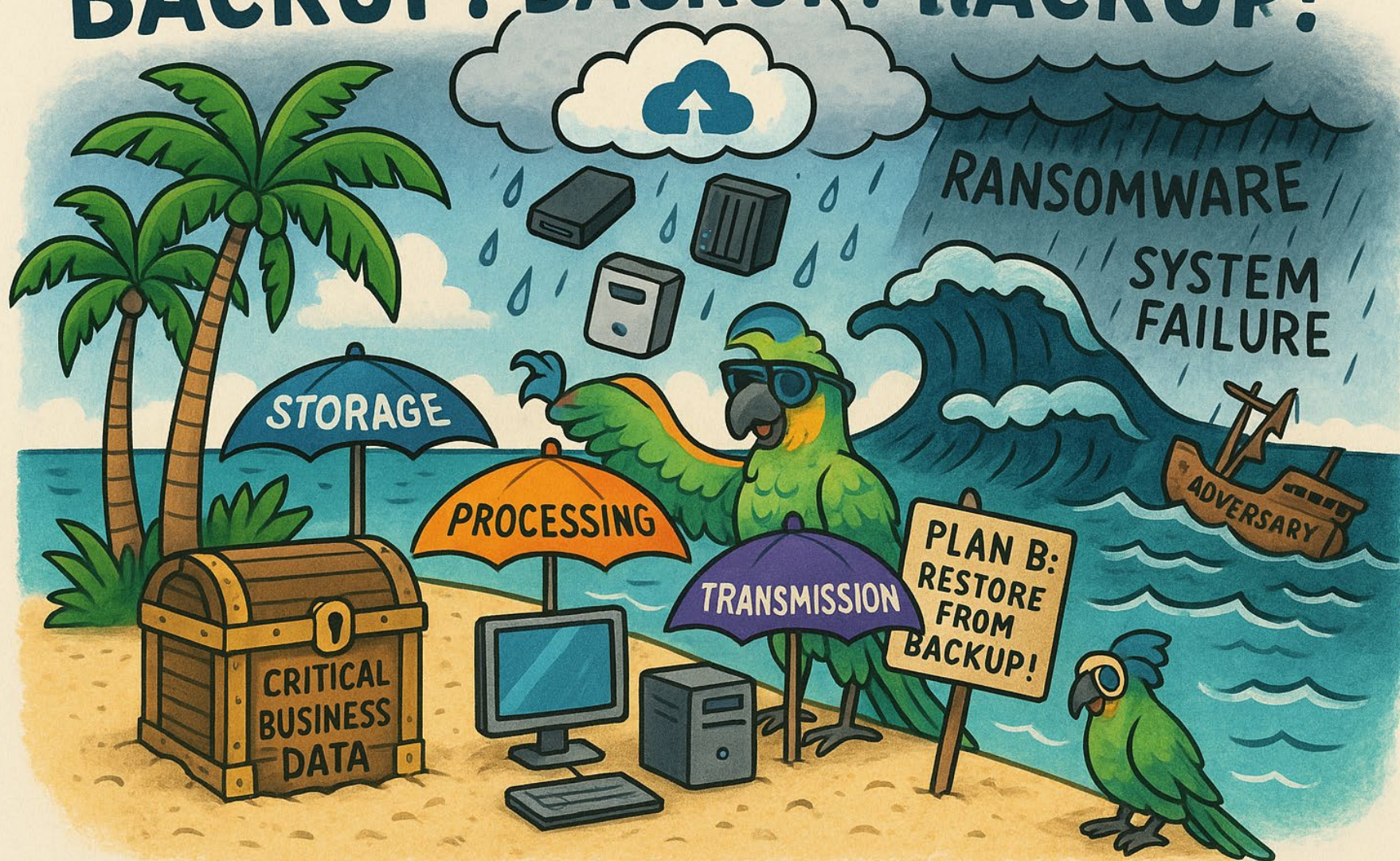


- fake and unsafe websites.
- unsuspected emails and attachments.
- bad links in email or social media ads, videos, articles, and Messenger

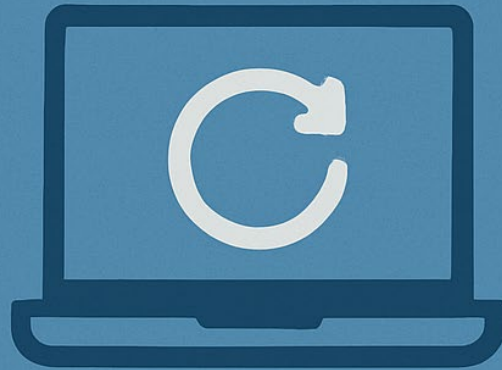
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BACKUP! BACKUP! RACKUP!



UPDATE!



**OPERATING
SYSTEM**



**VIRUS
PROTECTION**

What Do I Do If
I Suspect I Have
Responded to a
Threat like BEC
or Phishing?



**WHAT SHOULD
I DO IF
I CLICKED?**

**Don't panic.
Follow your
organization's
cyber-policy
and
cyber-attack
plan.**

**Report to management
immediately.**

**If needed, management should
seek guidance from software
and IT vendors.**



How Do We Stay Away From “Hacker’s Paradise?”

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STRONG PASSWORDS AND MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

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MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION



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MFA REQUIRES MORE THAN A PASSWORD



**Password
Know**

**Biological
Who You Are**



**Key Card/
Phone/
Sunscreen
What You Have**




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TREASURE MAP TO A STRONG PASSWORD

Make it long
like the coastline



Mix in upper/lowercase,
numbers, and symbols

No predictable
paths







WEAK

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MODERATE

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STRONG

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CREATE STRONG PASSWORDS



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Other Important Protection Rules

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Education

Security Awareness Training



TNCOT.CC/CYBERAWARE

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[Computer Security](#)

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[Cybersecurity 101](#)



Cyber Aware Resources

[Useful Links](#)

[Questions to ask Vendors](#)

[Reporting Cyber and Data Incidents](#)

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Social Media



**UNDERSTAND YOUR
CYBERSECURITY
POSTURE!**



**CYBERSECURITY
POSTURE!**

HAVE A PLAN!



CYBERSECURITY

WHY DO WE NEED A CYBER-ATTACK PLAN?

**GUIDES STAFF REGARDING
STEPS TO TAKE AFTER
YOU REALIZED YOU HAVE
BEEN ATTACKED.**

**IDENTIFIES CRITICAL DATA
AND ASSETS—KNOW YOUR DATA
AND ASSET TREASURES
IN YOUR DATA FORTRESS.**

**IMPLEMENTS CONTROLS TO
PROTECT THAT DATA AND
CRITICAL ASSETS.**

**DIRECTS RESPONSE—CONTACTS
LIST—WHO ARE YOU GOING TO CALL?**

**DOCUMENTS CYBERSECURITY
INSURANCE INFORMATION—DO YOU
HAVE CYBER INSURANCE? KNOW
THE INSURANCE INSTRUCTIONS.**



BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN

“IF YOU
FAIL TO
PLAN,

YOU ARE
PLANNING
TO FAIL.”

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/460142-if-you-fail-to-plan-you-are-planning-to-fail>

Conclusion

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Protection Measures-Overlap

How Do We Maintain Confidentiality of Our Data and Networks?

- Employee Training
- Know what your sensitive information is and where it is stored.
- Restricting access to least privileged users.
- Strong Password Protection Or Multi-factor Authentication.
- Logging Out of the Application when away from workstations and locking the workstation. To lock select Ctrl+Alt+Delete.
- Password protected screen savers or sleep settings that activate within 30 minutes or less of inactivity.

How Do we Maintain Integrity of our Data and Networks?

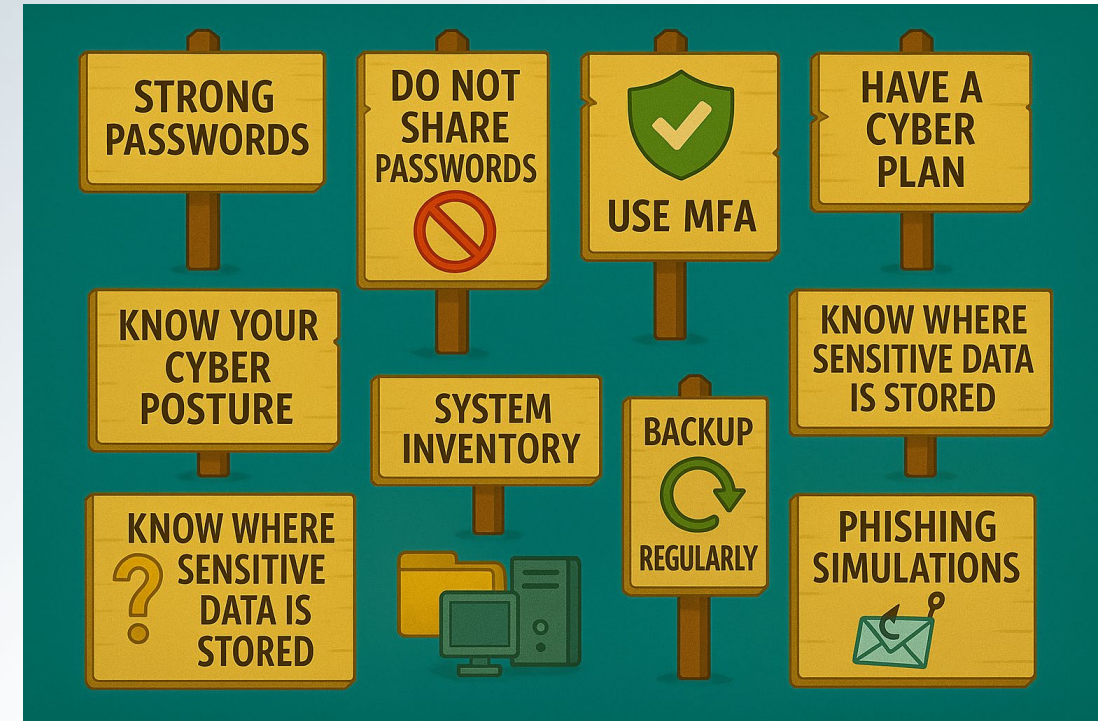
- Employee Training
- Physical Security
- Backup and Recovery Procedures and Plans
- Least privileged user access
- Data Validation and Verification
- Audit Trails and logs.

How Do We Protect Availability of our Data and Networks?

- Employee Training
- Update and Patch
- Backup Data Daily.
- Redundancy of backups/ store off-site weekly.
- Inventory your data.
- Implement and follow Record Retention Policies.
- Proper Disposal of data and records.
- Monitoring

• 🌴 Stay Safe with These Island Rules:

1. **Education-Participate in Cybersecurity Trainings often.**
2. **Create Strong Passwords**
🔑 Use passphrases or complex combinations — change them often.
3. **Never Share Your Passwords**
🚫 Not even with your “captain.”
4. **Use MFA (Multi-Factor Authentication)**
🛡️ Two keys to unlock the treasure.
5. **Develop a Cybersecurity Plan**
🗺️ Every island needs a map.
6. **Know Your Sensitive Data and understand your cybersecurity posture.**
💎 What’s the treasure, and where is it buried?
7. **Install Antivirus & Anti-Malware Software**
🦟 Watch for sneaky creatures in the sand.
8. **Keep Operating Systems Updated**
🔧 Patch those leaky beach huts.
9. **Backup Regularly**
🛶 Keep a lifeboat ready offshore.
10. **Run Phishing Simulations**
👤 Practice spotting the fake bait.
10. **Be a Good Crew Member**
🧠 Stay alert, think before you click, and report anything suspicious.



Data Island Safety Measures

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Map Out the
Island



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What to Do If There Is a Cybersecurity Attack



1. Detect and Identify

Monitor for suspicious activity



2. Contain the Threat

Isolate affected systems



3. Assess the Damage

Investigate the scope and impact



4. Eradicate the Threat

Remove malware and access



5. Recover Operations

Restore from clean backups



6. Review and Learn

Analyze the incident and response



Cyber Aware Resources

Useful Links

[Questions to ask Vendors](#)[Reporting Cyber and Data Incidents](#)[Speaker Request](#)[Cyber Plan Suggestions](#)[Cybersecurity Newsletter Subscription](#)

Useful Links

[State of Tennessee Cyber Hub](#)[Tennessee Cyber Awareness Website](#)[Free Security Awareness Training](#)[Center for Internet Security](#)[FBI Cyber Crime](#)[Department of Homeland Security](#)[AGA - Cybersecurity Hub](#)

Questions?

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