

Spear Phishing

Spotting the Threat

The email threats faced by organizations today vary greatly in complexity, volume, and impact. Here we take a closer look so you can spot the threat before it harms you or your organization.

Spear phishing is a highly personalized form of email phishing attack. Cybercriminals research their targets and craft highly personalized messages, often impersonating a trusted colleague, website, or business.

Spear-phishing emails try to steal sensitive information, such as login or financial credentials to commit fraud, identity theft, and other crimes. Social-engineering tactics are commonly used in spear-phishing attacks to increase the likelihood of success. These include a sense of urgency, brevity, and pressure.

Spear attempts can be spotted by recognizing their clues:

- Messaging that includes an uncomfortable level of personalization coming from a source you don't recognize..
- References to topics or events that are oddly coincidental.
- A send date or time that falls outside normal business hours.
- A heightened sense of urgency or alarm.
- Promises of rewards or threats if you do or don't act.

If you feel you're been targeted, consider changing social networking settings to keep personal information private.

Example

You've been nominated!

Dear (email.firstName) (email.lastName),

We are pleased to inform you that a colleague of yours has nominated you to be a feature profile in our [online magazine](#) as most influential thought leader of the year!

We carefully select our nominees based on a number of factors including professional accomplishments and industry achievements—and we are happy to say that based on our research, our editorial staff feels your combination of business skills and leadership make you more than worthy of our nomination.

Our readers are achievers, and a profile in our publication would put you in touch with some of the most successful and well connected professionals in your industry. It would also give you the opportunity to share your story as well as insights into the life of a successful executive.

Simply [click here](#) to learn more about you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Professionals Org. Editorial Staff



▶ Nominations of any kind are an appeal to ego used by spear phishers designed to get you to engage.

▶ A personalized email with flattering copy is an attempt to create an emotional connection.

▶ Spear phishers use personal information freely available online to craft targeted content.

▶ The highly designed logo and email look convincing, but a web search of the organization would reveal it doesn't exist.