



How Free is 'Free' Email

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Recently, we heard three personal stories about people getting locked out of Gmail because their account had been hacked. Two of these cases were here in Sarasota County. Their accounts had been compromised, and then used to send harassing emails to the contacts stored with that email address. Threats, demands for money, and even death threats were associated with these compromised accounts. Not only is it heartbreaking to hear the stress and anguish that people go through when they cannot access contact information or important emails. These people were afraid that someone was going to hurt them or their family.

We are writing this article as a cautionary tale about using free email services. There are costs- they are generally hidden, and they emerge when there is a problem. If your account becomes compromised, your reputation will suffer. Your compromised account can potentially send threats and demands for money to your friends, family, business contacts, and potential customers. Read on for more of the stories...

What Happened?

A user tried to log into Gmail, with email address and password, and found out that his/her password would not work. While going through the help screens from Google, the user supplied the username, and Google responded that it would send the password recovery information to a secondary email address. In these cases, the secondary email address had been replaced by a bogus email address. The

rightful owner of the Gmail account could not reset the password.

Password Recovery Failed, What Next?

The password recovery procedure failed because criminals replaced the original secondary email address with a bogus email. Once the password recovery fails, Google directs users to fill out an account recovery form.

Let's not forget, that the user still cannot access email, contacts, or anything else stored in Gmail. The compromised account is pumping out threatening emails to all the contacts in that email account.

Account Recovery Form? I Can't Remember when I signed up for Gmail!

The Account Recovery Form required users to provide a list of Google products associated with the locked account and the date when you started using each one each Google product. The Recovery Form also asked for account creation date, last successful login date, as well as last password the owner remembered. Could you remember all that?

Was Gmail Hacked?

Last October, Google confirmed that thousands of Gmail accounts were compromised by an "industry-wide phishing scheme." According to the BBC, the login data of over 30,000 Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, Comcast, and Earthlink accounts had been posted online. Hackers and criminals



Securing our Digital Future

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alike can purchase your login data in underground cyber markets.

When will the Rightful Owners be able to Access Their Email Again?

Online forums and blogs are reporting that Google has taken up to two weeks to restore access to accounts that were compromised. That means, no access to those important emails and contacts. Furthermore, free email services do not backup your emails.

Could Your Business Function Without Email for a Day or More?

Free email services work great for newsletters and keeping in touch with friends, but free email services are a risky proposition for entrepreneurs and business owners who need timely information to make decisions. Successful businesses cannot be without email or customer contacts for even one hour!

According to the National Archives & Records Administration in Washington, D.C.. 93 percent of companies that lost their data for 10 days or more filed for bankruptcy within one year of the disaster, and 50% percent filed for bankruptcy immediately. Could that be your business?

I use Gmail for personal use. What should I do to protect my Gmail account? Remember to protect yourself online by changing the passwords frequently and watching for any odd behavior. Never, ever, use the same password on multiple web sites. If one site become compromised, now all websites with

the same password are potentially compromised.

Be safe online!

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