

Identifying a Phishing Email

What is phishing?

This technique is called **phishing**, and it's a way hackers con you into providing your personal information or account data. Once your info is obtained, hackers create new user credentials or install malware (such as backdoors) into your system to steal sensitive data.


Phishing emails today rarely begin with, "Salutations from the son of the deposed Prince of Nigeria..." and it's becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish a fake email from a verified one. But, most have subtle hints of their scammy nature. Here are seven email phishing examples to help you recognize a malicious email and maintain email security.

Email phishing examples

Are you sure that email from UPS is actually from UPS? (Or Costco, BestBuy, or the myriad of unsolicited emails you receive every day?) Companies and individuals are often targeted by cybercriminals via emails designed to look like they came from a legitimate bank, government agency, or organization. In these emails, the sender asks recipients to click on a link that takes them to a page where they will confirm personal data, account information, etc.

1. Legit companies don't request your sensitive information via email

Chances are if you receive an unsolicited email from an institution that provides a link or attachment and asks you to provide sensitive information, it's a scam. Most companies will not send you an email asking for passwords, credit card information, credit scores, or tax numbers, nor will they send you a link from which you need to login.

From: GlobalPay <VT@globalpay.com> 

Subject: Restore your account

Date: February 7, 2014 3:47:02 AM MST

To: David

1 Attachment, 7 KB


Save ▾

Quick Look

Dear customer,

We regret to inform you that your account has been restricted.
To continue using our services please download the file attached to this e-mail and update your login information.

© GlobalPaymentsInc


[update2816.html \(7 KB\)](#)

Notice the generic salutation at the beginning, and the unsolicited web link attachment?

2. Legit companies usually call you by your name

Phishing emails typically use generic salutations such as “Dear valued member,” “Dear account holder,” or “Dear customer.” If a company you deal with required information about your account, the email would call you by name and probably direct you to contact them via phone.

BUT, some hackers simply avoid the salutation altogether. This is especially common with advertisements. The phishing email below is an excellent example. Everything in it is nearly perfect. So, how would you spot it as potentially malicious?

Confirmation of your request from Hotels.com

MISC/Scams x



Hotels.com <Hotelscom@roktpowered.com>
to dave ▾

Nov 14, 2018, 11:38 AM (1 day ago)



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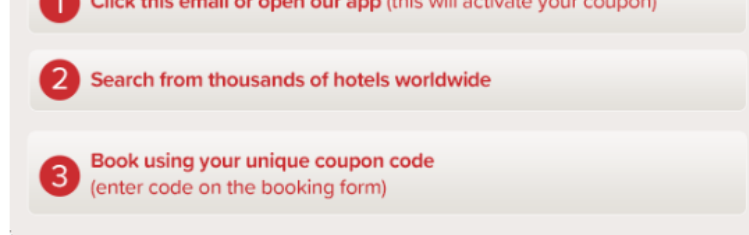
EMLRKUSH21850:SK7CM6

[Book now](#)

You must [click](#) through this email or book through our app to redeem this coupon.

*Use by 11:59 PM MT on 01/15/19 for travel by 04/30/19. Can't be used on some hotels. See details below.

Bookings using this coupon are not eligible for Hotels.com™ Rewards.



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This offer is for email subscribers. It's only valid when you click through from your Hotels.com coupon email. Access your Hotels.com coupon email from your inbox and click through to our website. Apply your discount before you book.

Use this coupon to get \$50 off the price of your booking at a participating Best Price Guarantee hotel when you stay between 1 and 28 nights and you spend a minimum of \$350 for your entire stay.

You must pay for your stay when you make the booking. The discount only applies to the first room in the booking. You'll need to pay the full price for any other rooms. The discount doesn't apply to any taxes, fees or additional costs.

To use this coupon, you must be over 18 years old and resident in the United States. You may only use this coupon for bookings made between 12:01 am MT on July 1, 2018 and 11:59pm MT on January 15, 2019 on the US version of Hotels.com for a stay with a check-in date between July 1, 2018 and April 30, 2019. Bookings are subject to availability and the hotel's terms and conditions.

This coupon can't be used for:

1. Package bookings i.e. hotel + flight
2. Bookings made through Group Travel Services
3. Bookings paid for at the hotel
4. Bookings paid for in a foreign currency
5. Bookings at non-participating hotels
6. Bookings made prior to receipt of this coupon

This is a very

convincing email. For me, the clue was in the email domain. More on that below.

3. Legit companies have domain emails

Don't just check the name of the person sending you the email. Check their email address by hovering your mouse over the 'from' address. Make sure no alterations (like additional numbers or letters) have been made. Check out the difference between these two email addresses as an example of altered emails: michelle@paypal.com michelle@paypal23.com Just remember, this isn't a foolproof method. Sometimes companies make use of unique or varied domains to send emails, and some smaller companies use third party email providers.

From: Costco Shipping Agent <manager@cbcbuilding.com>
Subject: Scheduled Home Delivery Problem
Date: January 6, 2014 10:54:37 PM MST
To:
Reply-To: Costco Shipping Agent <manager@cbcbuilding.com>

[Hide](#)



Unfortunately the delivery of your order [COS-0077945599](#) was cancelled since the specified address of the recipient was not correct. You are recommended to complete [this form](#) and send it back with your reply to us.

Please do this within the period of one week - if we dont get your timely reply you will be paid your money back less 21% since your order was booked for Christmas.

1998 - 2013
Costco Wholesale Corporation
All rights reserved

"Costco's" logo is just a bit off. This is what the Costco logo is supposed to look like.




See the difference? Subtle, no?

4. Legit companies know how to spell

Possibly the easiest way to recognize a scammy email is bad grammar. An email from a legitimate organization should be well written. Little known fact – there's actually a purpose behind bad syntax. Hackers generally aren't stupid. They prey on the uneducated believing them to be less observant and thus, easier targets.

From: Best Buy <BestBuyInfo@fashionlab.com.ua>
Subject: Special Order Delivery Problem
Date: December 20, 2013 11:06:08 AM MST
To: dave
Reply-To: Best Buy <BestBuyInfo@fashionlab.com.ua>

[Hide](#)



My Best Buy ID: 002024460
Reward certificate(s) available.

WEEKLY DEALS

GIFTS

Tvs

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Cell Phones

Appliances

Cameras

Video Games

Audio

Sir/Madam,

Your order [BBY-4983814314](#) has not been delivered because the specified address was not correct. Please fill this [form](#) and send it back with your reply to this message.

If we do not receive your reply within a week we will pay your money back less 17 because your order was reserved for the time of Christmas holidays.


Best Buy 7601 Penn Avenue South, Richfield, MN 49584-7655

BEST BUY, the BEST BUY logo, the tag design, [BESTBUY.COM](#), GEEK SQUAD, the GEEK SQUAD logo, MY BEST BUY, REWARD ZONE, BEST BUY MOBILE and the BEST BUY MOBILE logo are trademarks of BBY Solutions, Inc. All other trademarks or trade names are properties of their respective owners.

In addition to the generic salutation, grammar gaffes are usually a good clue that something is wrong. "Please fill this form..." And notice the '17' reference in the middle of the sentence.

5. Legit companies don't force you to their website

Sometimes phishing emails are coded entirely as a hyperlink. Therefore, clicking accidentally or deliberately anywhere in the email will open a fake web page, or download spam onto your computer.

From: Manager Daniel Bridges <daniel_bridges33@gulfslipformpaving.com> 
Subject: Information
Date: August 26, 2013 1:25:12 AM MDT
To: dave
Reply-To: Manager Daniel Bridges <daniel_bridges33@gulfslipformpaving.com>

USPS.COM

Notification

Our courier couldnt make the delivery of parcel to you at 20th August.
Print label and show it in the nearest post office.

[Print a Shipping Label NOW](#)

USPS | Copyright 2013 USPS. All Rights Reserved.

*This whole email was a gigantic hyperlink, so if you clicked **anywhere** in the email, you would initiate the malicious attack.*

Revision #1

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