

IN THE HEADLINES

## HACKING 101

**H**acking, the computer world's version of breaking and entering, has been around as long as the Internet itself. And the criminals have gotten bolder than ever. Last summer alone, online assailants broke into the computers of Citigroup, Sony Online Entertainment, and gaming company Bethesda Softworks, gaining access to information pertaining to nearly 25 million customers. But do these thefts mean that your financial information is in danger?

Probably not, experts say. Most consumers whose data have been stolen suffer no ill consequences. "In some cases, these cyber criminals just want

to prove that they can break into the computer systems," says Chuck Davis, a professor of ethical hacking and computer forensics at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Shadowy hacker groups, like Anonymous and LulzSec, aren't particularly interested in most people's private data. "They're breaking in to be able to brag about it, not to swipe and sell personal information," says Beth Jones, a senior security adviser at SophosLabs North America, a Boston-based security company.

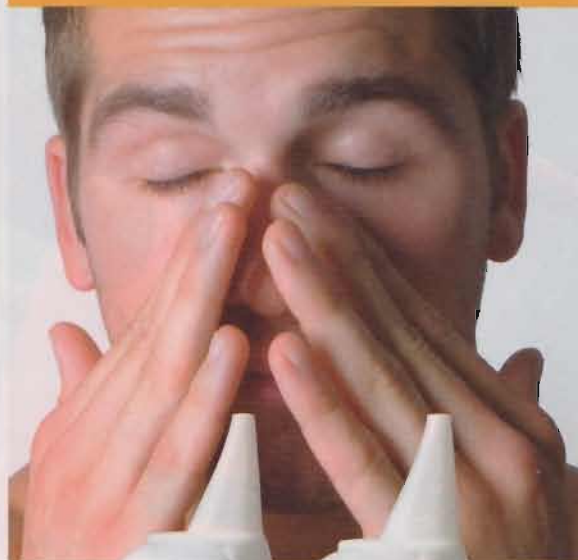
Nevertheless, you can take a few steps to be safer should an attack strike a company that you do busi-

ness with. To start, refrain from keeping your credit-card details on file with online merchants, says Jones: "That way, if your account is compromised, no one can rack up charges under your name." And if you hear of an assault on an institution that you have an account with, contact its customer-service or public-relations department immediately. If your information wasn't exposed, you don't need to do anything. But go ahead and change your passwords if it helps you sleep at night. Hacking may cause nightmares for corporations, but it doesn't have to cause them for you.

—Brian Barrett,  
with additional reporting  
by Eric Buttermann



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