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Computer security Course teaches to guard against hackers

*Dave Burge
 El Paso Times
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A typical computer is attacked every 30 seconds by hackers, identity thieves and assorted viruses, technology experts say.

"You're constantly fighting against people trying to get in, would-be hackers," said Romeo Alvarez, who supervises the computer technicians and help desk for the El Paso Independent School District.

Alvarez was among a group of business and government professionals who took a high-level computer security course last week at AdEdge Computer Training Center, a locally owned facility that specializes in corporate and government training.

Houston-based consultant Michael Gregg, a leading authority on computer-security issues, taught the course.

"What we teach is to proactively handle attacks and hackers," said Gregg, who has written four books on computer security. "What you learn is how attackers and hackers think."



Victor Calzada / El Paso Times
Instructor Michael Gregg, standing right, and Charles Martinez of AdEdge Computer Training Center, also standing, helped students during a seminar on computer security for business professionals. Among the students who took the course were, from left, Jorge Caballero, Romeo Alvarez and Michael Valencia.

For more information

- AdEdge Computer Training Center, 1421 Lee Treviño, Suite B-2, offers training in a wide range of computer-related subjects for business and government professionals. Classes cost from \$199 to \$4,000.
- The school plans to bring security expert Michael Gregg back in February for another class.
- Information: Charles Martinez, 599-1116.
- Gregg's Web site, www.thesolutionfirm.com, has free articles on identity theft and other security topics.

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"This is huge," Gregg said. "All it takes is one negative article in a newspaper saying that you lost your customers' personal information. It's very hard to get those customers back."

Miguel Gamiño, president and chief executive officer of high-tech company

Varay Systems, did not attend the weeklong workshop, but agrees that computer security is a "big deal" for businesses.

"It will probably be one of the biggest budget lines for businesses in 2006," Gamiño said. "It's a growing need. We're growing a security practice, meaning we're putting more emphasis within our business on providing security services."

Businesses and individuals can take a handful of common-sense measures to help secure their computers and networks from attacks, Gregg said.

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- Update your anti-virus program on a weekly basis.
- Be cautious of unsolicited e-mail from companies or individuals you haven't heard of.

Under no circumstances should you ever provide personal information in response to an unsolicited e-mail, Gregg said.

Identity thieves often try to mimic reputable companies or organizations in order to steal your personal information, like your bank account number or Social Security number.

This is known as phishing and is a common form of identity theft, experts say.

- Update your browser so you don't get infected with adware, which will give you a constant stream of pop-up advertisements.
- Create a firewall. A firewall acts like a "border guard" and controls traffic into and out of your computer, Gregg said.
- Turn on the encryption setting to secure your wireless Internet connection, Gregg said.

"By default, it's off," he said.

Alvarez of EPISD advises computer users to "use your updates."

"Have an anti-virus and anti-spyware program and don't use file-sharing programs," he said.

Gregg's 40-hour course teaches information-technology professionals how to secure their networks from hackers, viruses and identity thieves.

By attending the course and passing a test, you can become a certified information systems security professional, said Charles Martinez, information-technology training coordinator at AdEdge.

"It's not only a certification, but you can use it to market yourself," Martinez said. "This is a very hot class around the country right now."

The course costs \$2,500. AdEdge plans to bring Gregg back in February to teach another class.

Alfredo Perez, the information-technology director for Helen of Troy, attended the course last week to learn the latest trends in computer security.

"We can't afford to lose any data," Perez said. "We can't afford to lose computer service. Our computers need to be up 24/7."

Businesses are more tempting targets than individuals when it comes to cyber crime, such as hacking and identity theft, Perez said.

"There's more to lose," Alvarez agreed. "There's proprietary information and financial data."

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