

Staying Safe in the Shadow of the Dark Web



The terms “dark web” and “darknet” conjure up images of the seamy underbelly of society, a network of crime cloaked in anonymity. To be sure, the dark web attracts arms dealers, identity thieves and pedophiles in abundance.

However, this alter ego of the surface web is in actuality both more and less than the headlines would suggest. To protect yourself and your personal information, you would be wise to take a few minutes to learn more about the dark web and how to stay safe in its shadow.

Dark Web vs. Deep Web

Contrary to some reports, the dark web does not include over 90 percent of the internet. This common misconception arises from confusion between two related terms. In reality, the internet includes several layers:

- Surface web – This is the public portion of the web. It makes up roughly four percent of the internet and includes millions of searchable web sites.
- Deep web – Also known as the invisible web, this is by far the largest layer of the internet, with over 90 percent of all internet content. The bulk of this information involves perfectly legal content that is not indexed by the standard search engines. Your medical records, banking information and other member-only web sites live here.

- Dark web – Sites on the dark web are accessible only with special software that allows users to communicate and transact business anonymously. While this creates a haven for criminals, it also serves a legitimate purpose for whistleblowers, activists and victims who need to remain anonymous.



Identity Theft and the Dark Web

If the dark web includes only about three percent of the internet, do I need to be concerned? Yes. Remember Equifax and Target? Whenever a web site experiences a data breach involving personally identifiable information, that information will almost certainly appear for sale on the dark web, likely within hours.

Once your stolen information hits the dark web, you may find that your identity has purchased goods, applied for a mortgage, even received medical treatments thousands of miles away. The repercussions can follow you for years.

Protect Yourself

While there is no foolproof way to keep your personal information from falling into the wrong hands, you should take these simple steps to protect yourself:

- 1) Monitor your personal data – Check your credit report and financial accounts regularly to look for suspicious activity. Reputable sites such as havebeenpwned.com also allow you to see if your email or passwords have been compromised in a data breach.
- 2) Employ a good password strategy – Change your passwords regularly. Avoid using the same password for multiple web sites. Use strong passwords and consider two-step verification as a second layer of protection.

- 3) Immediately invalidate compromised data – Keep in mind that recovering your personal data once it hits the dark web is impossible. Instead, your best bet is to simply invalidate data once you discover a breach. Cancel the credit card, change the password. Consider placing a freeze on your credit lines.

Remember that prevention is better than a cure when it comes to the dark web. Take the time to understand internet safety and take appropriate measures, even if that occasionally means sacrificing convenience for security.



Protect Your Business

While data breaches at mega companies like Target make the news, in recent years small business have become more frequent targets for cyber criminals. In many cases, smaller organizations such as medical practices store more valuable data. In addition, breaches of these organizations often go undetected.

Keep in mind that a breach of your company's systems means not only data loss but also potentially a loss of reputation. To guard critical data, employ [multi-layer security](#). For merchants, if you have not already implemented [EMV chip technology](#) for your point of sale (POS) systems, do that now.

Navigate the Web with Expert Guides

As with any potentially dangerous territory, the internet is a much safer place when you work with an experienced guide. IT security professionals can help you build a strategy to keep your personal and business data safe. Whether implementing [secure cloud solutions](#) or tapping into our considerable [retail security expertise](#), you can count on eMazzanti for the protection you need.

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