

Forum:[Hack Forums](#)

Thread: [Social Engineering basics - Pretexting](#)

ObsidianMD - January 3, 2026, 11:36 am

Pretexting

Pretexting is an important part of social engineering where an attacker creates a fake scenario before contacting their target to increase the chance of getting the information they're after, convincing the target to do XYZ (phishing, install malware, etc.), or convincing others you're someone you're not.

Let's go over some examples to demonstrate the importance of pretexting.

You've obtained some new ransomware and the business you plan on targeting is a plastic surgery clinic. You would develop a pretext in a way that appears you're a new potential client, doing your homework on what type of procedures are available at this clinic, the physicians who work there, and going over in your head what types of situations could arise when you make contact with the target(s) via telephone or by email. You want to gain their trust and by developing the proper pretext will give yourself credibility to your target(s) because you appear to be knowledgeable and "real". This gives them the idea that you are who you say you are leading them more inclined to deal with you and increase your chances of success.

Doing your research on your target is important and separates the professionals from the amateurs when it comes to social engineering, hacking, fraud, etc. All this shit is kind of tied in together in a lot of ways these days.

Some scammers, phishers, and fraudsters use pretexting to create a situation that is under some sort of time restraint to influence people to do what they want. This is a classic technique. We all get those phishing emails that tell you to confirm your account by a certain date or it'll be deleted and a nice link for you to click to rectify the problem. The pretext of the phishing email is creating a scenario that seems urgent yet adding a timeline so people feel more pressure to follow through with the email.

Legitimate businesses develop pretexts too. Right?

"For a limited time only buy this product for \$49.99. Buy now sale ends soon!". The pretext here is influencing people that they need to buy now in order to get the deal as it will end shortly. When the reality is this is a simple marketing technique to make people feel they should make the purchase right now as they don't want to miss.

Pretexting and thinking about a scenario to entice your target to respond to an email is important when it comes to phishing or delivering malware. Most people think that sending (1) phishing email is how everyone is somehow tricked into giving their credentials out and yes, some people definitely do fall for stupid phishing campaigns. However, when it comes to targeting certain individuals and organizations for the most part this isn't just (1) simple email sent and success just happens magically. You want to send an email with a thought-out pretext to start a relevant conversation with your target so they reply to your email, develop dialog and rapport, and when the time is right sending your phishing link or your attached malicious Word document for them to open and WHAMMIEEEE!

Let's take another example to hammer the point home of pretexting. Let's say you're after the place of birth of an individual for whatever reason and this individual lives in your neighborhood. Maybe you're after their place of birth because you can't find it online and you need it because it's one of answers to their secret question for their bank account or one of their online accounts. We all know these types of confirmations.

This target you know visits a specific park or place of business frequently and one day you approach them with the pretext of pretending to know who they are in order to social engineer the place of birth from the target.

It would go something like this:

You:

Hello FRANK we met at my cousin's birthday party a few months back, how are you?

Target (Mike):

No, I'm sorry my name is Mike you have the wrong person lol (some awkward behaviour would take place).

You:

Aren't you FRANK? You went to high school with Jimmy where you two grew up in downtown LA?

Target (Mike):

This answer really depends on your confidence when talking to the target, your demeanor, maturity, etc. as most people will say "No I grew up in Detroit" or flat out say "No you have the wrong person". If they don't give you the right answer then follow up again with a "Where did you grow up then?" in a friendly non-threatening way guiding them to provide you with the right answer. This is all personality based and being an excellent social engineering can be related to being an awesome actor.

Remember, creating a solid pretext is like creating your background story for who you are and why you're contacting the target(s) in question whether that's over the phone, in person, or by email. Being a good social engineer is all about trust and credibility so take the time to put effort into developing your pretext before you attempt to social engineer anyone and you'll stand a much better chance into convincing them to do something that will benefit your interest and not theirs.

CutePenguin - January 3, 2026, 1:18 pm

I love your explanation of pre-texting. Thanks for sharing this!

zhirtex - February 22, 2026, 8:58 am

What happen it target have anti-virus? Ransomware spotted...?