

Five Movies That Predicted Today's Cyber Crimes

Equifax. Deloitte. The Securities and Exchange Commission. Sonic. Whole Foods. These are just a few of the hacking incidents that have made the news in recent weeks. Although organizations are becoming increasingly concerned about their cybersecurity in the wake of current reports, Hollywood has been warning us for years about the importance of keeping our data safe. The following five movies are not only entertaining, they also acted as a crystal ball of sorts by giving us a glimpse into the possibility of today's cyber events.

Movie: "The Net" (1995)

Lesson: Your data is the most important possession you have.

"The Net" is a warning of what can happen when your data falls into the wrong hands. When systems analyst Angela Bennett receives a disk from a colleague, she inadvertently sets off a chain of events that lead to her social security number being reassigned to another name, her home being sold out from under her, and an arrest for a litany of crimes she didn't commit—not to mention the mysterious deaths of people around her who know about the disk.

Although most people will not suffer such dramatic consequences from a breach to their information, character Jeff Gregg, the owner of software company Gregg Microsystems, sums up the importance of data in this way: "You need to remember in this day and age, information is sacred."

This proclamation is especially true for CPAs, because you not only handle your own data, you are the keeper of your clients' most sensitive information—so you should always remember to take steps to treat it as the valuable commodity it is.

Movie: "Sneakers" (1992)

Lesson: Always encrypt your data.

In "Sneakers", security specialist and hacker Martin Bishop is hired to find a black box that holds an encryption key people are willing to lie, steal, and even kill for. Martin later finds out that it's really his old hacker buddy, Cosmo, who wants the box because "the world isn't run by weapons anymore or energy or money. It's run by little ones and zeros, little bits of data."

In order to keep the little bits of data that run your professional world safe, it's important to get it encrypted, which is the process of scrambling information in such a way that it is rendered unreadable without a key. By encrypting your company's data, you can ensure it is protected on all of the devices you work on, whether they are desktop computers or mobile phones. Also encryption allows you to safely transmit data, store information in the cloud, and remain compliant with relevant data protection regulations.

Movie: “Independence Day” (1996)

Lesson: One virus can bring down an entire system.

In “Independence Day”, we’re faced with a high-tech alien invasion that only a skillfully-planted computer virus can thwart. Although you don’t have to worry about the destruction of a fleet of spaceships with aliens intent on taking over the world, a cyberattack can still have catastrophic effects on your business in terms of lost data and productivity, as well as the cost to rectify the problem. In fact, according to the 2017 Cost of Data Breach Study from IBM and the Ponemon Institute, data breaches cost U.S. organizations an average of \$7.35 million per incident.

Movie: “Hackers” (1995)

Lesson: Companies can protect themselves from hackers by learning from them.

In order to protect itself from cyberattacks, the Ellingson Mineral Company hires a former hacker, Eugene “The Plague” Belford, to help protect its data. This is not as outlandish as it may sound: More and more companies are hiring white-hat hackers, also known as ethical hackers, to use their skills to find vulnerabilities in their systems. But organizations should be careful who they choose because, as Ellingson Mineral Company learned the hard way in “Hackers”, these employees may turn their technical abilities against the companies they work for.

Movie: “Six Degrees of Separation” (1993)

Lesson: Identity theft can cause chaos in your life.

When Paul in “Six Degrees of Separation” interjected himself into Flan and Ouisa Kittredge’s life by pretending to be a friend of their children, as well as Sidney Poitier’s son, he causes the couple to spend hours trying to figure out his real identity—and determine how deep his deception goes. Much like the Kittredges, people who are the victims of identity theft spend dozens of hours resolving the problem. In addition, identity theft can be costly. Although Paul was only able to get \$50 from the couple, in real life, identity theft cost consumers \$16 billion in 2016 alone.

While life may imitate art, and these movies provide an entertaining perspective on current cyberattacks, when it comes to your own data security, you need real-world solutions. The AICPA’s Cybersecurity Resource Center at www.aicpa.org/cybersecurity provides those solutions with information on best data security practices, risk management, and the assurance services CPAs can offer their clients.