

Phishing Attacks

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Phishing

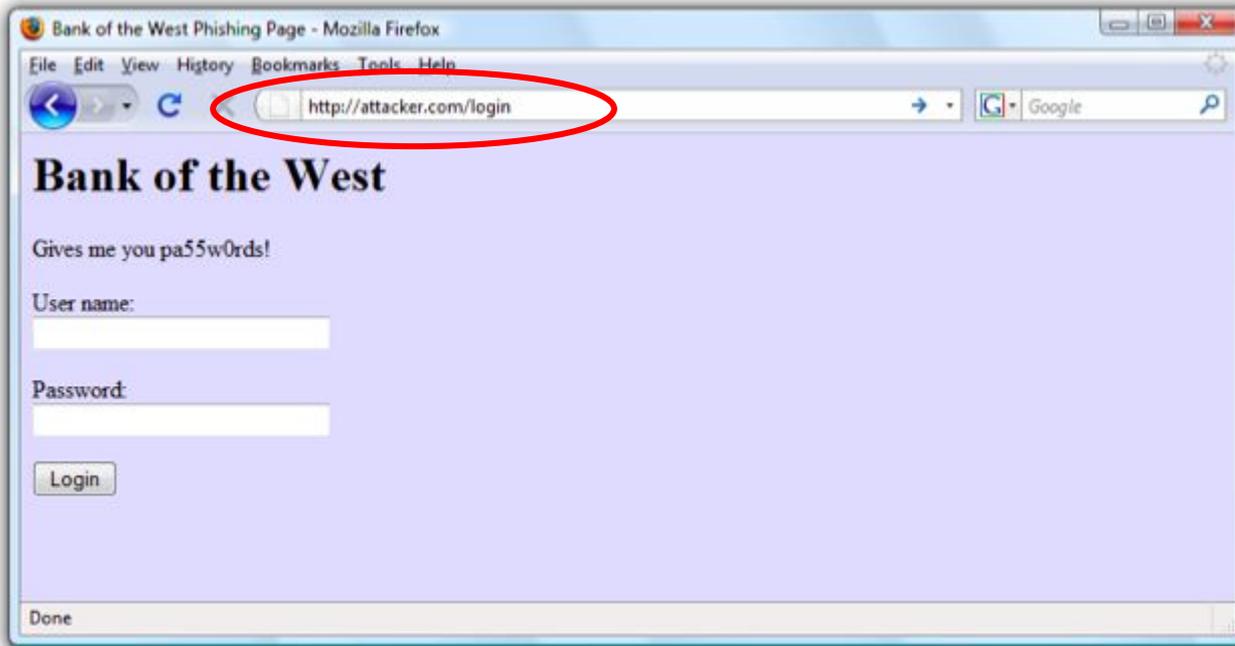
- Basic idea:
 - Get unsuspecting users to visit an evil Web site
 - Convince them that the evil Web site is actually a legitimate site (such as a bank or PayPal)
 - Trick the user into disclosing personal information (password, credit card number, etc.)
 - Use the personal information for evil purposes such as identity theft.
- How to attract users?

Spoofing legitimate sites

How to spoof the legitimate site?

- Copy HTML
- Include images from legitimate Web site
- Many links refer back to the legitimate Web site
- After collecting login info, log user into legitimate site, redirect to legitimate site
- User has no idea that password has been stolen

URL could be obviously Illegitimate



Or very subtly different: Look-alike characters



International Character Sets

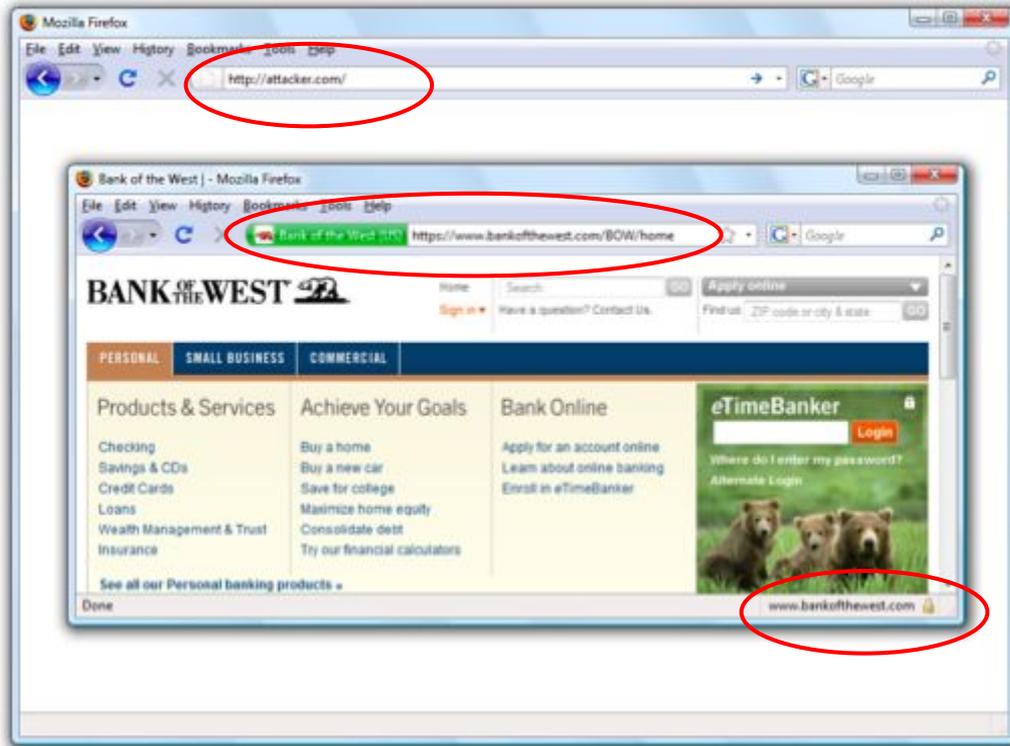
- What does this URL refer to:

www.bank.com/accounts/login.php?q=me.badguy.cn

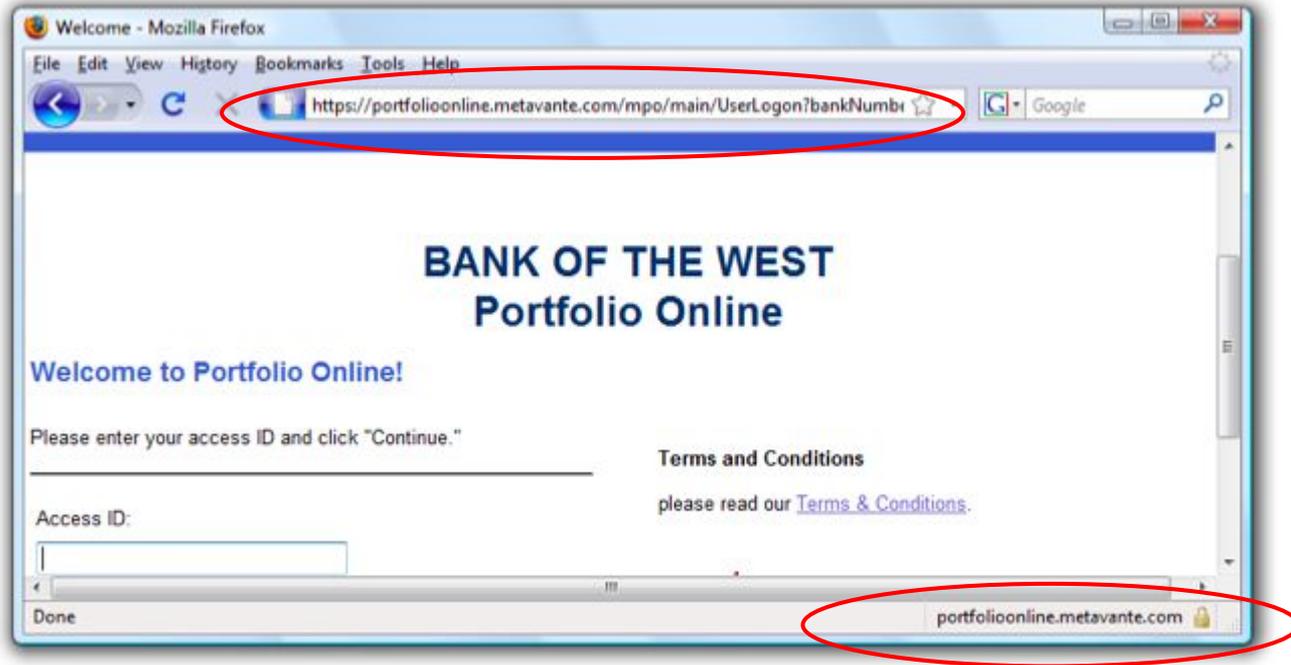
Chinese characters that look like "/", "?", and "="

- This is a host name only!

Picture in picture



Legitimate Partners Can Look Fishy



Counter-measure: visual indicators

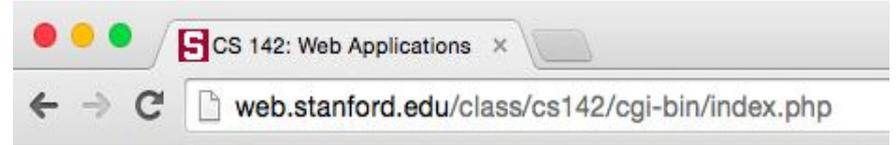
- Help users identify legitimate sites:
- Lock symbols to indicate HTTPS
 - Color change to indicate HTTPS

Problems:

- Lock symbols not always obvious

HTTPS Indicators

Chrome



Safari



Firefox



Problem: too easy to obtain certificates

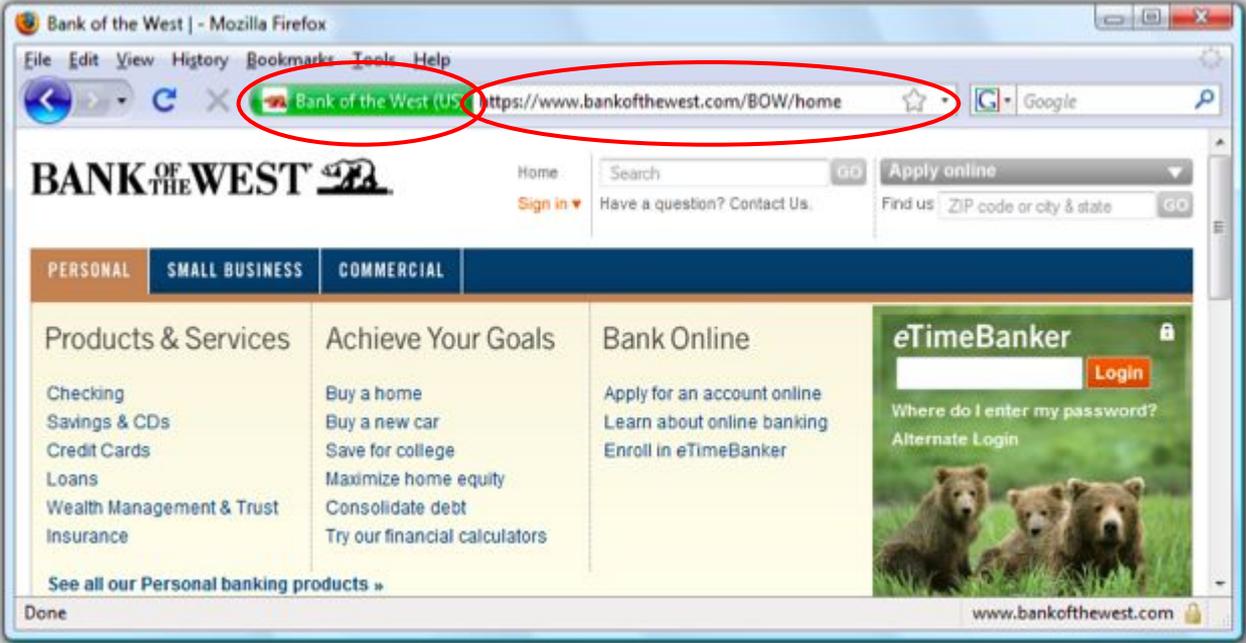
Problem: too easy to obtain certificates that look like legitimate sites

- Example: bankofamerica-secure.com
- Pressure on certificate authorities to issue certificates quickly
- E.g. "domain validation only" certificates: certificate authority only verifies that applicant has right to a particular Internet domain name; no verification of legal status of organization.

Counter-measure: extended validation certificates

- Goal: prevent attackers from obtaining certificates that look like legitimate sites
- Certificate authority must thoroughly vet the organization obtaining the certificate; prevent look-alike names.
- Certificate authority must undergo audits to ensure it is doing the vets carefully.
- Browser provides special indicator for extended validation sites
- Problems:
 - Small organizations don't like delays and cost of extended validation
 - Until recently, extended validation indicators not very visible in browsers (but much better nowadays).

Extended Validation Certificates



Other counter-measures:

- Browsers starting to include anti-phishing measures (warn users about known phishing sites)
- Legitimate Web sites can monitor traffic; changes may indicate attacks under way:
 - Spike in download rates for official images
 - Unusual rate of password changes, funds transfers
- Legitimate sites can incorporate personal information in emails to authenticate them: phishers won't have such information.
 - **Spear phishing** - Phishing with attacker having personal information

Other issues

- Legitimate Web sites often use deceptive techniques to get users to click through ("your last chance for ..."), which reduces distinction between honest and dishonest sites.
- Education ineffective against phishing: response rates to phishing e-mails comparable to those for "legitimate" commercial e-mail.
- Warnings about shady certificates are ineffective: people just click through.

Two examples in the news

- Snapchat divulged employee information in phishing attack
 - “Last Friday, Snapchat’s payroll department was targeted by an isolated email phishing scam in which a scammer impersonated our Chief Executive Officer and asked for employee payroll information, ...
- Stanford staff member and student got an email with a Word doc they opened
 - Word doc contained a macro that encrypted the user's home directory and provided instruction how how to buy the encryption key.
 - **Ransomware**
 - Memo: Stanford won't reimburse you for paying ransoms