

# Data Thieves in Action

## An Exploration of the Structure and Organization of Stolen Data Markets

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Hackers and cybercriminals can readily acquire large amounts of sensitive consumer data through phishing, mass compromises, and malicious software infections and then sell the information in on-line forums for profit. Few researchers have considered the organizational composition of the market for stolen data and the network structures that support participants. In particular, there is little information on managerial oversight of data markets, the complexity of and division of labor, coordination of among buyers, sellers, and forum operators. This study utilizes qualitative and quantitative analyses of a sample of threads from active web forums operating out of Russia and Eastern Europe to examine the organizational hierarchies and social networks present in the market. The findings suggest that participants operate within collegial networks that enable the sales process, while the larger market utilizes a diverse division of labor to facilitate cybercrime from initial theft of data to the final removal of funds from accounts. The study has implications for criminological theory as well as law enforcement computer security professionals charged with detecting and disrupting the practices of both hackers and data thieves.

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9<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Center (New Building)  
524 West 59<sup>th</sup> street

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