

Beyond HOPE Hacks into Big Time

From their own patron saints to a hacker OS, NY's Renaissance Weekend for the hacker community highlighted the further evolution of computer pranksters into the mainstream - and into serious money.

[Austin Bunn](#) 08.11.1997 12:08 PM

With security personnel up from the CIA hometown in Langley, Virginia, mixing with hackers up from basements across the country, the techno-bacchanal Beyond HOPE highlighted the further evolution of computer jocks into the mainstream - and into money. Now that security concerns and hacking have yielded a booming industry ("tiger teams" of contractual crackers), it should come as no surprise that this rowdy, packet-sniffing bunch has learned to capitalize on its true talent: working the network.

"Five years ago, they were a fringe, the Net was this obscure thing used to hack phone tech manuals," says security and cryptography expert [Bruce Schneier](#), who spoke at this weekend's conference, held in New York and sponsored by hacking mag [2600](#). "Now there are companies whose life blood is the Net, like Yahoo, Amazon.... And hackers are being 'outed,' getting hired for penetration testing or starting companies."

The three-day conference, keynoted by MSNBC commentator Brock Meeks, proved that hacking is not a lifestyle choice, but a community with its own rock stars ([LOPHT](#)), renegades (Metro-card hacking Red Balaklava), martyrs (Bernie S., Phiber Optik), and even patron saints (Cheshire Catalyst, Captain Crunch).

While Steve Rambam walked the audience through the method for acquiring a fake Social Security card, the media-savvy Mudge, wearing a "Microshit" T-shirt, filled the group in on Theo de Raadt's OpenBSD, a hacker-written operating system. With an exploit script, an easy-to-use interface, and good name, "it will get press," said LOPHT member Mudge. "Microsoft hates that, and that's why we love it."

But the real attraction was the bank of Unix terminals prepped for public consumption - and corruption. And while the hacker movement is gaining force, it's also gaining speed. This year, the conference boasted an operational 10 Mbps local network, compared to the crawling 28.8 Kbps they had in 1994. "If you have a machine on the network, expect to be hacked," said 2600 founder and conference organizer Emmanuel Goldstein, "because that's what we're here for."

The 1,000-person strong Beyond HOPE is among a growing number of hacker conferences, including Black Hat and DEFCon IV, both held in July in Las Vegas. The happy-camper [HIP conference](#) was held, perhaps unwisely, simultaneously. HOPE attendee CyberJunkie hacked the HIP conference homepage and riddled it with HOPE icons.

Though there's clearly a greater handshaking between law enforcement and the hacker community, Bernie S. knows well that the amity has a ways to go. The co-organizer of the 2600 meeting, the boyish Bernie was sent to prison in May 1995 by the Secret Service for publishing a list of the service's [communications frequencies](#), [code names](#), and [photos](#) of agents in action (and picking their noses).

The [case](#) against him began to verge on the absurd when agents confused the dental putty in his garage with plastic explosive. As the cause celebre of the culture, Bernie S. typifies the resiliency of the group. "If you try to squelch info, it won't get better," he said. "It'll mushroom."

Though most hackers subsist off freeware, the conference offered

multiple opportunities for conspicuous consumption. "Major Hacking" cookies were on sale at the "Buy Our Shit" concession stand. A letter-bomb detector went for US\$40 (used), and another table offered "I Love Your Computer" bumper stickers and "Co-Ed Naked Hacking" T-shirts ("Finger Me for More Info"). For the more serious consumer, Nadir sold hot hard drives and CD-ROM drives for \$50 a pop. Will he guarantee it works? "I'll guarantee I brought it here," he answers. He's a student, and it's the first time he's tried selling hijacked equipment, he says. "I just want to make people happy."

Ritalin junkies may have dominated by far, but the elder statesmen of the movement were there in force. Phone phreak Cheshire Catalyst, the founder of 2600 precursor TAP (Technical Assistance Program), started his newsletter in 1971 for "pay-phone justice" - basically a primer on how to make phone calls on a penny. Captain Crunch, a more grizzled veteran who served time, reminisced about the time he prank-called Nixon in the White House. ("Sir, we have a crisis," he recalls saying. "What is the nature of crisis?" Nixon asked. "Sir, we're out of toilet paper," Crunch answered, and hung up).

But for those on the outside, the line between allegiance and antagonism isn't always clear. MSNBC commentator [Brock Meeks](#) called for hackers to "pump up the volume," and bemoaned the loss of elegant hacks like the hole-sniffing [Satan](#) or Hacker X's coup stripping the Cyber Promotions server and posting it all over news groups.

"Twenty percent of government computers have been subject to hacking attempts - that's a pretty low percentage," he said. "Get off your asses and make that go up."

Later, a black-clad attendee who requested anonymity scoffed at Meeks' coaching. "It's so self-serving," he said. "He just wants to write about it."

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