Dark Web or Deep Web? Exploring the Differences and Risks

By Cindy King, Director of Membership Services and Human Resources

WITH DATA BREACHES and ransomware attacks on the rise, many of us are leery when it comes to the Internet. We change passwords often (or ought to), are careful not to open unexpected email attachments, and remain skeptical of Bitcoin and other forms of cryptocurrency. Then there’s the dark web—or is it the deep web?—a mysterious place that both intrigues and frightens.

Exploring the Deep Web

So what exactly is the deep web, the dark web, and why do they exist? The website techadvisor.co.uk describes the deep web as all those web pages that can’t be found by most search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

The deep web refers to pages that are hidden from most search engines. The dark web can’t be accessed by common browsers; specific software and authorizations are required.

The deep web includes the dark web (more on this later), but much of the deep web is innocuous and the content benign. Still, the deep web can be accessible to hackers. It includes user databases, webmail accounts, pages behind a paywall, and pages with registration required, such as online forums. Website administrators develop deep web pages when they create web content. These are the pages administrators will review, edit, and test prior to launch on their websites. Other deep web pages may contain user databases of those who have been granted access to a restricted portion of a given website.

Dark Web is Something Far Different

While you may have heard the terms “deep web” and “dark web” used synonymously, these terms actually have very different meanings. Wikipedia defines the dark web as “World Wide Web content that exists on so-called darknets, which are overlay networks that use the Internet but require specific software configurations or authorization to access.” Browsers like Internet Explorer, Chrome, and Firefox cannot access these sites.

The most common way to access the dark web is to download what is known as an anonymity tool that conceals information about user activity; one such browser is I2P. The most well-known is the free Tor Browser Bundle; Tor is an acronym for “The Onion Router.”

Tor works by processing a user’s IP address, the unique set of numbers that identifies one’s computer, through nodes that attach to the IP address so others only see a part of it.

Tor was developed and received much of its funding by the U.S. military in the mid-1990s as a means for intelligence information to be shared anonymously. The advent of fiber optics enabled networks to connect across countries and continents, and the government took advantage of this technology.

The military later released Tor into the public domain as a strategic move to promote democracy, since it enabled people living in totalitarian countries such as China to communicate outside the country. Of course, Tor also

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Workshop Promotes Civic Engagement and Well-Being

MMRMA, ITS EVENTS PLANNING Committee, and events planner Denise McGinn take pride in providing excellent speakers and content at our Risk Management workshops. This March’s event was no exception. The schedule was packed with timely, useful information from start to finish. Here we share a few highlights.

Engagement Matters
Tim Skubick returned to kick things off at the general opening session. He shared his insights on all things politics, from Michigan’s gubernatorial race to other state elections and national issues.

As always, Skubick delivered his presentation with a deft blend of humor and experience. A key part of his message: Michigan voters need to be more engaged in state and local races, which affect each and every one of us.

Skubick encouraged participants to learn about primary candidates, follow statewide and local races, and make informed decisions at every stage of the election process and beyond. He also made the case for Michiganders to pay closer attention to state legislation and other activities taking place in Lansing.

Time Management
Ercell Charles of Mentor Performance Systems delivered two powerful breakout sessions. In the first, he shared knowledge and techniques for leadership in today’s increasingly time-crunched world.

People are busier than ever, and it may sometimes feel as if we don’t have time to lead. Ercell’s suggestions included setting aside time to plan and protecting it with his 5/20 rule: If someone wants to speak with you, he says, “Tell them they can have five minutes now or 20 minutes later.”

Another of his catch-phrases that might prove useful when setting your daily priority list: “Four and no more.” Focusing on top priorities leaves time for the inevitable interruptions while still allowing you to focus on what’s important.

Ercell also touted the benefits of effective delegation. Leaders may not always delegate because it takes more time at the outset and requires trust. Still, time and trust are well invested, empowering team members to contribute more.

Life-Work Balance
In the afternoon, Ercell discussed generational shifts in the workplace and how to balance a team’s differing perspectives on work, home, and success. Here are some of his suggestions for boosting our sense of value and satisfaction in the workplace—and in life:

> Create significance by connecting our achievements with the meaning they hold for others.

> Be purposeful in carrying out our actions and fulfilling responsibilities.

> Provide recognition to one another.

These approaches can help establish collaboration, accountability, and authenticity in our daily interactions.

Increasing Capacity
Special guest Chris Johnson of On Target Living reminded attendees that our health is vital, because when we feel better, we perform better. His aim is to help people expand their capacity when many see theirs shrinking due to increased stress and poor health.

According to Johnson, the foundation for boosting our capacity is threefold:

1. Rest. Improves focus and lets us direct our attention where it’s needed. Look for ways to sleep better and experience true down time, away from your devices, with the people who matter most to you.

2. Eat. Provides energy and fuels everything we do. We don’t have to overhaul our entire diet overnight to make improvements. Chris suggests moving closer to whole foods whenever we can and making other incremental changes in how we feed ourselves and our families. His Food Target diagram, available in the Members Only area of www.mmrma.org in the Workshop Materials: Documents folder, shows exactly how to do it.

3. Move. Increases our drive and propels us in the direction we want to go. Again, moderation rules—we don’t need to dive into an intensive exercise program. By standing and walking more often and doing simple stretches throughout the day, we can improve circulation and give our bodies and brains a welcome boost.
CAP Grants Help Members in Pursuit of Best Practices

by Cara Cowal, Manager of Risk Management Services

In 2014, the MMRMA Board of Directors, in accordance with its strategic plan, allocated an additional $250,000 to the Certification and Accreditation Program (CAP) section of the Risk Avoidance Program (RAP) to help members earn certification and accreditation by various organizations. The Membership Committee reviews CAP grant applications and allocates funds on a quarterly basis.

CAP Grant Overview
CAP-eligible opportunities are divided into individual and departmental categories.

Individual opportunities encompass curricula such as police/fire staff and command schools, FBI National Academy, Zoning Administrator Certification, and Certified Playground Safety Instructor.

Reimbursement is currently 75 percent of tuition costs upon successful completion of the course and approval of the grant application.

Examples of departmental opportunities include the Michigan Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (developed by the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police) and the American Public Works Association Accreditation (APWA). These programs are highly involved and can take several years to complete.

They also require a significant commitment of municipal staff time and financial resources to comply with the standards and best practices of these organizations.

Grant Review Process
MMRMA’s Membership Committee reviews upwards of 75 applications for various risk management-related projects each quarter.

Grant applications for consideration in May are due to MMRMA by April 20, 2018, before the committee’s next meeting on Monday, May 21.

The next two deadlines for CAP grant applications are April 20 and July 13.

The next subsequent deadline is Friday, July 13, 2018.

The RAP/CAP Standard Grant Guidelines provide details on currently recognized programs and products. While funding limits are specified, MMRMA and the Membership Committee reserve the right to modify these guidelines at any time.

Go to www.mmrma.org for a full list of qualifying programs, CAP guidelines, and the application process. For more information, please contact Cara Cowal, Manager of Risk Management Services, at 734-513-0300 or ckowal@mmrna.org.

Canton Township Earns APWA Accreditation

MMRMA recognizes longtime member Canton Township’s Municipal Services Department for earning National Accreditation status through the American Public Works Association (APWA). Only 132 other municipal entities in the United States and Canada have achieved this standard of quality and operational efficiency. Achieving this accreditation demonstrates that the Canton department understands best management practices, examines their operations regularly, documents their policies and procedures, and engages in continuous process improvement.

Five-Year Plan
The Municipal Services Department also developed a five-year Strategic Plan, which has been recognized as a “Model Practice” by the national APWA Accreditation Board and will serve as an example for other agencies across North America. Canton Municipal Services Manager Bob Belair says the five-year plan helped the department set current and future goals and identify objectives that must be met to accomplish these goals.

Canton plans to submit a Certification and Accreditation Program (CAP) grant application for consideration by the MMRMA Membership Committee, which will review the project and determine an appropriate level of funding to help the township recoup some of the costs of achieving APWA accreditation.

Click here for a full write-up of Canton Township’s achievement.
made it possible for terrorists and criminals to freely communicate with each other, which the U.S. government anticipated and continues to monitor.

Unsavory Uses Abound

In essence, the dark web is a decentralized collection of thousands of websites. Some believe it is 500 times the size of the World Wide Web. Sites range from the mundane or humorous to illegal sites—some have been described as “horrifying.”

One example of an illegal dark website was Silk Road, which the FBI shut down in 2013. Presumably named after an historic trade route linking China to seaports, Silk Road was an online black market engaged in selling illegal drugs.

In 2014, Wired magazine reported that 80 percent of dark websites are related to pedophilia. Three years ago, the United Kingdom launched a cybercrime unit whose focus is to investigate human trafficking via the dark web. Other dark web activities include selling counterfeit goods or weapons, hacking, credit card cloning, hitmen for hire, X-rated content, and Bitcoin tumbling. In order to find these types of sites, visitors to the dark web must find creative means, as no known search engines exist to query them.

Whistleblowers, Log-In Fraud

The dark web also has several whistleblower sites, providing a venue for people to report on illegal activities they have witnessed. Perhaps the most infamous whistleblower, Edward Snowden, used the dark web to expose government secrets to the general public. Scientists may also use the dark web to store raw data gleaned from research.

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Hartwick Pines State Park, home to the largest stand of old-growth white pine in the Lower Peninsula, takes a day in April to celebrate the sweet sap of Michigan’s maple trees—with tree tapping, sap boiling, and of course, syrup sampling. It takes 10 gallons of maple sap to make a single quart of syrup. Michigan ranks fifth among the states for maple syrup production.

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The Risk Journal is published six times a year for members of Michigan Municipal Risk Management Authority. We welcome your feedback. To comment or suggest story ideas, please contact Tamara Christie, communications specialist, at 734 513-0300, 800 243-1324, or tchristie@mrmra.org.

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Users can be one click away from a site engaging in illegal or unsavory activity.

On March 22, 2018, Market Watch reported that content marketing agency Fractl monitored the dark web for fraud-related activity, including the sale of user log-in information.

Fractl found that a Facebook log-in may fetch $5.20. Other log-in prices included $1 for a Gmail account and $10.51 for a T-Mobile account, while log-in credentials for a Pay Pal account could earn a cyber thief $247 or more. Rick McElroy, a security strategist with Carbon Black, says that “with 5.3 billion records released due to accidents and 2.6 billion records released due to hacking last year, personal information is becoming cheap.”

Be Aware, Be Vigilant

For the average internet user, as well as for public entities, it’s wise to steer clear of dubious sites. Keep in mind that, on the World Wide Web, you could be one click away from accessing a site engaged in illegal or extremely offensive activity.

It’s more important than ever to employ sound password practices and other cybersecurity measures to protect our personal data and that of our organizations. The newly formed Technology and Cyber Security Risk Control Advisory Committee will help MMRMA continue to provide information and resources on these timely topics for our members.