Managing in the Digital World: Not So "Anonymous"—Activists, Hacktivists, or Just Plain Criminals?

File-sharing sites like Megaupload.com, best known for its massive size and volume of downloaded content, are hotbeds of online piracy. After being shut down by U.S. authorities, Megaupload.com formally bade goodbye in 2012 as New Zealand police raided several homes and businesses linked to its founder Kim Dotcom (a name he took on after making a fortune during the dotcom bubble). With only a slight warning from a tweet reading, "One thing is certain: EXPECT US!," a hacktivist group called Anonymous launched "Operation Payback" (Figure 10.1); utilizing 5,635 *zombie computers* distributed throughout the Internet, Anonymous delivered a retaliatory attack resulting in a string of highly coordinated takedowns of Web sites managed by the U.S. Department of Justice and a number of other organizations that have publicly supported anti-piracy legislation, including the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America, and Universal Music.

Who is Anonymous? Having no formal organization and no formal leadership, Anonymous is often considered to be a loose collective of hacktivists—Internet users practicing civil disobedience by taking part in

cyberattacks on Web sites. The group has participated in several cyberattacks; the best known concerned a vigilante movement against VISA, MasterCard, and PayPal as a protest for their freezing the accounts of the whistleblower site **WikiLeaks**. Anonymous is also politically active, launching attacks on Israeli government Web sites in response to Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip. Not all of Anonymous's actions are controversial, however: Anonymous garnered much public sympathy with the 2011 "Operation Darknet," its attempt to battle child pornography. In 2012, Anonymous members defended a teen victim of cyberbullying. Following the devastation of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and massive tornado damage in Oklahoma in 2013, Anonymous mobilized its online influence to support relief efforts. These efforts were considered by many to be more effective than those of government relief agencies.

Anonymous is well known for its Internet vigilantism. Although Anonymous claims to have good intentions, what the group does is sometimes illegal, and Anonymous and its supporters face a dilemma between pursuing (sometimes worthwhile) ideological goals and crossing the boundaries of legality.

After reading this chapter, you will be able to answer the following:

1. What is the difference between hacktivists, cyberterrorists, and other computer criminals?

2. What tools can hacktivists and other computer criminals use to attack information systems?

3. How can organizations and individuals protect themselves from attacks by hacktivists and other computer criminals?

FIGURE 10.1

The symbol of the Anonymous group is a mask depicting the historical figure Guy Fawkes.
Source: dny3d/Shutterstock

Based on:

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