

How ransomware works

1 Ransomware comes in the form of an e-mail with an attachment or a Web address. The moment the attachment is downloaded or the link to the Web address is clicked, the virus downloads itself into the computer.

2 The ransomware takes advantage of flaws that may exist in the computer operating system due to a variety of reasons including the lack of the latest fixes and patches.

3 Once active, the ransomware encrypts the data in the hard drive, usually with a 24-bit encryption which is virtually impossible to decrypt without an unlock key. Demands are then made for payment, usually via bitcoins because it is almost impossible to trace the recipients. The hackers may then send the unlock key. In many cases, they don't even do that and the data in the computer is lost forever.

4 Newer forms of ransomware, such as WannaCry, use flaws in the operating system to replicate themselves and spread to other devices connected to the network like a computer worm.

