Shining a Light on the "Dark Web"

The Dark Web is not as mysterious as you might think. In fact, most of the sites that exist on the Dark Web are public sites that can be accessed by anyone. Provided you know where to look.

The Dark Web is a collection of websites that mask their IP addresses using programs such as Tor or I2P. By doing so, they make it impossible for search engines like Google or Bing to locate them and add them to their search results. Instead, users have to use the same software as the website (most commonly Tor) and know where to look for the sites they want to find.
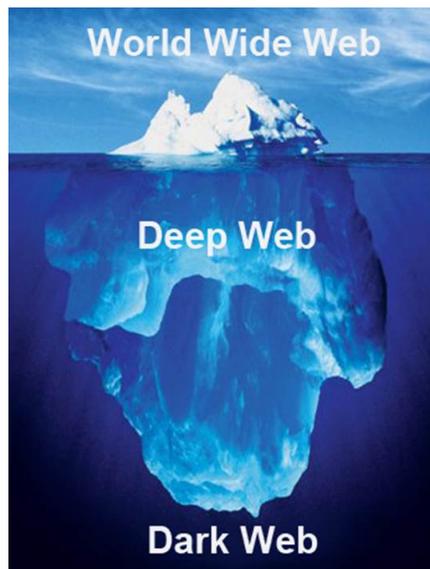
Underneath the publicly accessible web is the Deep and Dark Web not indexed by common search engines (Google & Bing). These are hidden databases requiring special software or authorization to access.

Because these sites have hidden IP addresses and don't appear in search results, it makes them very difficult to monitor and regulate.

This anonymity makes the Dark Web an ideal location to conduct illegal activity. You can find just about anything out there: illegal drugs, landmines, prostitutes, child porn. If you can think it up, it's probably already there. And let's not forget stolen personal and financial information.

On the Dark Web, you can find credit card information, Social Security numbers, login and password combinations, and any other form of identifying information. The authorities know the information is out there, unfortunately, there's not much they can do to stop it. The sites that host these types of sales are all-but untraceable, as are the identities of the persons buying and selling on them.

Even when authorities are able to discover the location of a site, taking one down doesn't stop the trade. When authorities shut down the best known black market site on the Dark Webs, Silk Road, back in 2013, it took only a few weeks for Silk Road 2.0 to take its place.

So what does all this mean for the more innocent web users among us? Remember that big breach that happened a few weeks ago? Or the one a few weeks before that? These days, there's a new breach all the time. And every time a company gets breached, there's an identity thief looking to sell the stolen information. Sites like Silk Road make doing that as easy as selling your old golf clubs on eBay.

The Dark Web is just one more reason it's critical to keep your customer information secure – and keep an eye on your own while you're at it.

First Nonprofit Group
An AmTrust Financial Company

First Nonprofit Group is now offering AmTrust Cyber Monitoring *at no charge* to members in 2016. AmTrust Cyber Monitoring scans the Dark Web and will alert you if we find your business credentials are bought or sold. But you need to sign up here first.

Sources

"What is the Dark Web?" Wired. http://www.wired.com/2014/11/hacker-lexicon-whats-dark-web/

"The dark web: what it is, how it works, and why it's not going away." Vox. http://www.vox.com/2014/12/31/7470965/dark-web-explained