

Giving Thanks for the Hackers, Crackers and Thieves



Peter Silva, 2010-22-11

This holiday season, give you friendly neighborhood hacker (black or white hatted) and nice pat on the back. 'Why?' you may ask. 'Aren't they responsible for the nasty botnets, malware, SQL injections, stolen identities, government infiltration, Stuxnet, and all the malicious things you warn against in this very blog?' Yes, but over the years it's been the very same folks attempting to and successfully gaining access to systems to infect, steal, snoop and causing general havoc that have made security better. All the new variants of worms, viruses, trojans or the all encompassing 'malware' force security professionals to stay alert, review risks and come up with solutions to thwart such attacks. It is a great battle of wits in this game of chess that's played out over the internet. Patch one hole, find another; lock one system, infiltrate another; fix one vulnerability, expose another.

As an aside, I'm using the term 'hacker' to mean both the good and the bad. In the media, the term hacker has grown to mean someone with bad intentions who breaks into computers with malicious intent, but within the programming world, it's also considered a compliment. A hacker is just someone with exceptional computer skills that can, essentially, make a system do what they want. Even the term 'hack' can be good and bad; a compliment or insult. If you 'hack' something with criminal intentions, then it is bad but if you come up with a clever way or a brilliant 'hack' to accomplish something, then you are praised. Both break the rules - either the law or the accepted way of doing something.

Over the years, while software firms, financial institutions, retailers, travel outlets, ISPs and others would deny the fact that there might be something wrong or a vulnerability within their code, systems and infrastructure, it would be the 'hacker' that would prove to the world and force the manufacturer to both admit and fix the weak link. As the years have passed and the hackers are often proven right, companies now (to some extent) welcome the insight of how to make their products more secure. 'Welcome' might not be the most accurate term but there is less denial and more acceptance, with quicker fixes, patches and other remedies. They have also made the individual user more aware of the things that might harm their computers and compromise their identity. They have made the casual user more savvy to avoiding those pitfalls, tricks and methods to steal personal information. They have taught us to be more careful about the links we click, the things we publish on social media sites and how we navigate the internet. Imagine how open

If you haven't figured it out by now, there has always been the Great Battle between Good and Evil – those who want to help and those who want to hurt; those with good intentions and those with bad; those with kindness and those who are cruel. Granted, it is not as black and white as depicted and there are many, many grey areas when it comes to doing what is right. If the bad guys have, by their actions, forced providers to bestow better solutions and make us, as users, safer, then have at it! With anything, if you can pull whatever good out of a bad situation and learn from it, then you are living a fruitful life – and that, you should be thankful for.

ps

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