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You may be making cryptocurrency for hackers without realising

By Chris Stokel-Walker

ADBLOCKERS are trying to prevent people from accidentally helping hackers mine cryptocurrencies. Malicious code running in the background of thousands of web pages can hijack a visitor's computing power to generate cryptocurrency – digital currency of which bitcoin is an example. Called cryptojacking, there is no sure way to avoid it, but blacklists kept by adblockers can shield you from the worst culprits.

Around 95 per cent of cryptojacking code is a modified form of something produced by German firm Coinhive. The firm's business model is that, instead of being bombarded by adverts, website visitors can mine a small amount of the cryptocurrency Monero. The websites get an income, of which Coinhive gets a 30 per cent cut, and visitors can browse ad-free.

Coinhive asks users before nabbing their processing power. However, hackers are secretly placing a variant of the code that doesn't onto thousands of websites. This means anyone who visits those sites ends up unwittingly generating cryptocurrency for the hacker who sneaked in the code.

Official government pages, including two Ukrainian ministerial sites and the website of the president of Bangladesh, have been hacked in this way. In total, the malicious code has been found running on at least 36,000 websites, and in 291 Android apps, according to analyses by Robert Baptiste, a researcher from French security company fsociety, and Troy Mursch, who runs Bad Packets Report, a computer security website.

In total, cryptojacking rakes in an estimated \$150,000 per month. "Once it's placed on a website, anyone on any device with a web browser that visits that site immediately starts mining," says Mursch.

Users can protect themselves with an adblocker. As well as blocking ads, these programs keep a list of websites known to host cryptojacking code and can warn users.

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