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THREAT INTELLIGENCE

3/1/2016
04:21 AM

Sara Peters
News

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Chinese Threat Intel Start-up Finds DarkHotel Exploiting Chinese Telecom

New China-based threat intelligence company ThreatBook wants to be the 'trusted contact in China.'

SAN FRANCISCO, RSA Conference -- The DarkHotel threat group is targeting executives at telecommunications companies in North Korea and China, already compromising at least one, according to researchers at Beijing-based threat intelligence start-up ThreatBook.

In operation since 2007, DarkHotel is named for their habit of exploiting executives while they were using unsecured hotel WiFi networks, a behavior the group has since abandoned. In this campaign, which ThreatBook refers to as DarkHotel Operation 8651, the group is using spearphishing messages with malicious documents attached -- specifically, a crafted SWF file embedded as a downloadable link in a Word document.

The SWF file exploits Adobe Flash vulnerability CVE-2015-8651. According to ThreatBook, the earliest infections associated with that bug and this campaign are Dec. 24. Adobe released an out-of-band patch for it Dec. 28.

The payload, update.exe, is a Trojan downloader, disguised as a component of OpenSSL. It then uses a variety of anti-detection measures, including anti-sandbox, and anti-anti-virus, as well as just-in-time decryption.

Feng Xue and Hong Jia, friends from their days working at Microsoft, first had the idea to start ThreatBook in May. After a hurried meeting at the Beijing airport Starbucks during Jia's two-hour layover en route to Redmond, Wash., the two quit their jobs -- Jia as principal anti-virus research manager at Microsoft and Feng as CISO of Amazon.cn -- and launched ThreatBook in June.

"I never thought I would leave [Microsoft]," says Jia. "The career path was quite good and I love Microsoft."

"I got excited and I could not sleep," says Xue.

The idea that hooked Xue and Jia was realizing that there was no threat intelligence market in China, but the need for one was great.

"Threat intelligence is not just a tool, it's a new wave. A trend," says Xue.

ThreatBook uncovered information about the identity and intentions of the XCodeGhost authors in October. This week they are exhibiting at RSA, introducing their security threat analysis platform and Threat Intelligence Center.

Xue says that at previous positions he's held there was a lack of understanding of China's unique landscape. He'd have to spend some of time at old jobs educating colleagues about, for example, enormous cybersecurity incidents in China that are so underreported in the West that they aren't even mentioned in yearly wrap-ups of top global attacks. "I feel sometimes frustrated," Xue says.

Jia says this is one of the things she wants ThreatBook to be able to fix. She says their focus is China-focused threat intelligence, and they're very open to exchanging information with other companies and other organizations.

"Our company is a bridge," she says. "We want to be the trusted contact in China."

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Sara Peters is Senior Editor at Dark Reading and formerly the editor-in-chief of Enterprise Efficiency. Prior that she was senior editor for the Computer Security Institute, writing and speaking about virtualization, identity management, cybersecurity law, and a myriad ... View Full Bio

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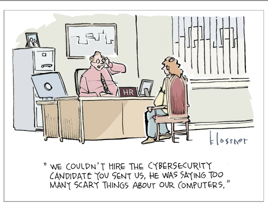

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- **CVE-2020-3922**
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  LisoMail, by ArmorX, allows SQL Injections, attackers can access the database without authentication via a URL parameter manipulation.
- **CVE-2020-10659**
  PUBLISHED: 2020-03-18
  Entrust Entelligence Security Provider (ESP) before 10.0.60 on Windows mishandles errors during SSL Certificate Validation, leading to situations where (for example) a user continues to interact with a web site that has an invalid certificate chain.
- **CVE-2020-8468**
  PUBLISHED: 2020-03-18
  Trend Micro Apex One (2019), OfficeScan XG and Worry-Free Business Security (9.0, 9.5, 10.0) agents are affected by a content validation escape vulnerability which could allow an attacker to manipulate certain agent client components. An attempted attack requires user authentication.
- **CVE-2020-8470**
  PUBLISHED: 2020-03-18
  Trend Micro Apex One (2019), OfficeScan XG and Worry-Free Business Security (9.0, 9.5, 10.0) server contains a vulnerable service DLL file that could allow an attacker to delete any file on the server with SYSTEM level privileges. Authentication is not required to exploit this vulnerability.
- **CVE-2020-8598**
  PUBLISHED: 2020-03-18
  Trend Micro Apex One (2019), OfficeScan XG and Worry-Free Business Security (9.0, 9.5, 10.0) server contains a vulnerable service DLL file that could allow a remote attacker to execute arbitrary code on affected installations with SYSTEM level privileges. Authentication is not required to exploit th...