



TLP: CLEAR

Private Industry Notification

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION • CYBER DIVISION

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www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices

(U) Cyber Criminals Phishing and Smishing US Retail Corporations for Gift Card Fraud

Summary

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is releasing this Private Industry Notification (PIN) to highlight cyber criminals' activity using phishing and Short Message Service (SMS) phishing (smishing) campaigns against employees at US retail corporate offices in order to create fraudulent gift cards resulting in financial loss. Private sector partners are encouraged to implement the recommendations in the "Mitigations" section to reduce the likelihood and impact associated with similar attack campaigns.

Threat

As of January 2024, the FBI noted a cyber criminal group labeled STORM-0539, also known as Atlas Lion, targeting national retail corporations; specifically the gift card departments located in their corporate offices. STORM-0539 used smishing campaigns to target employees and gain unauthorized access to employee accounts and corporate systems. Once they gained access, STORM-0539 actors used phishing campaigns to target other employees to elevate network

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access and target the gift card department in order to create fraudulent gift cards. Some of the techniques, tactics, and procedures (TTPs) observed by STORM-0539 actors included:

- Targeting a variety of employees' personal and work mobile phones in retail departments with smishing campaigns.
- Using a sophisticated phishing kit with the ability to bypass multi-factor authentication.
- Once an employee's account was compromised, conducting reconnaissance on the business network to identify the gift card business process and then pivoting to employee accounts covering that specific portfolio.
- Once in the network, attempting to access secure shell (SSH) passwords and keys in addition to targeting credentials of employees in the gift card department.
- After successfully gaining access to the corporate gift card department, creating fraudulent gift cards using compromised employee accounts.
 - In one instance, a corporation detected STORM-0539's fraudulent gift card activity in their system, and instituted changes to prevent the creation of fraudulent gift cards. STORM-0539 actors continued their smishing attacks and regained access to corporate systems. Then, the actors pivoted tactics to locating unredeemed gift cards, and changed the associated email addresses to ones controlled by STORM-0539 actors in order to redeem the gift cards.
- Exfiltrating employee data including names, usernames and phone numbers, which could be exploited by the actors for additional attacks or sold for financial gain.

Mitigations

The FBI recommends organizations establish and maintain strong liaison relationships with the FBI Field Office in their region. The location and contact information for FBI Field Offices can be located at www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices. Through these partnerships, the FBI can help companies identify vulnerabilities and malicious cyber activity, mitigate that activity, and bring those responsible to justice.

The FBI recommends organizations review and make sure their incident response plans are updated. In addition, the following mitigation strategies can be considered to help reduce the risk of and impact from smishing/phishing campaigns.

Organizational Strategies:

- Provide education and training for employees on how smishing/phishing scams work, how to identify them, and how to report them. Ensure there is mechanism and process for employees to report smishing/phishing attacks.
- Provide education to employees regarding being cautious about sharing sensitive information, including login credentials, when communicating via phone or web-based programs and not clicking on suspicious links. Requests for sensitive information should be verified through alternative approved methods. Urgent requests via SMS should be treated with caution.
- Require multi-factor authentication on as many accounts and login credentials as possible. When practical, use phishing-resistant authentication options.
- Employ anti-virus and anti-malware solutions and make sure they are updated regularly.
- Enforce a strong password policy, such as requiring strong and unique passwords for all password-protected accounts, employing lock-out rules for failed login attempts, restricting the reuse of passwords, and requiring the secure storage of passwords.
- Consider using network and end-point SMS filtering and anti-phishing tools.
- Implement security monitoring tools that log network traffic to establish baseline activity, and that enable detecting and addressing abnormal network activity, including lateral movement on a network.
- Enforce principle of least privilege throughout the organization's network. Account privileges should be clearly defined and regularly reviewed and adjusted as necessary.
- Maintain and enforce a Bring Your Own Device policy (BYOD). Provide education and training to employees on the BYOD policy.
- Phishing Guidance: Stopping the Attack Cycle at Phase One: [CISA Phishing Guidance](#)

Reporting Notice

The FBI encourages recipients of this document to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to their local FBI field office or ic3.gov. Field office contacts can be identified at www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices. When available, each report submitted should include the date, time, location, type of activity, number of people, type of equipment used for the activity, the name of the submitting company or organization, and a designated point of contact. Press inquiries should be directed to the FBI's National Press Office at npo@fbi.gov or (202) 324-3691.

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