

# Developing Secure Systems Individual Report

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## 1 Introduction

This report will present research of the top cyber threats and vulnerabilities of modern systems with the aim of identifying methods to mitigate them.

## 2 Part 1

### 2.1 Account Enumeration

Account enumeration is the manipulation of a service's login function to determine the existence of a user. Attackers would determine this through two actions, first by inputting a username and password into the login and if a message is received stating that the password is wrong but not the username, then the attacker now knows that the username exists. The way to mitigate this manipulation is to return a generic message for a login failure not specifying whether the username or password is wrong, however this mitigation can be nullified using the second method where the attacker will try to log in and then compare the time taken to resolve the failed login. If the response was quick then the username doesn't exist, if the response took slightly longer then the service recognised the username and took longer to try and match the password. This manipulation can also be mitigated by applying a delay to the response when the username is wrong so that the attacker could not tell the difference between the two responses. The mitigation methods described above fit into a secure by design approach because they are concerned with the back end implementation details of the system and are obscured well from any attackers. These techniques have been represented as pseudocode in section A.1 of Appendix A.

Threat actors likely to use account enumeration are attackers of any kind that could range from casual programmers to criminal hackers trying to access various services. A likely attack vector for using attack enumeration would be if the attacker had gained access to a list of passwords for a service and was trying to find users to match to so that they could break into the system.

The interaction between the end users and the service will not be greatly affected by the implementation of these mitigations with respect to the improved security they provide, these mitigations do not affect the process of a successful login. The only problem that can arise with usability will be that if a user forgets their password or isn't sure what username they used for the service, the generic message not specifying which is wrong can be frustrating and make logging in more difficult.

### 2.2 Session Hijacking

Session hijacking is the utilisation of a lack of security given to website sessions where a user that has logged in creates a session with the web server so that they can make requests to the server without having to send log in details for every request. These sessions have an attached ID so that the web server knows which user it is communicating with, session hijacking refers to the multiple methods used to gain access to a session, usually by accessing the ID.

When attempting to gain access using the ID, one possibility could be that the site uses existent session ID's rather than generating a new ID for every session. This opens up the session for attack from session fixation where the attacker uses a known ID in a phishing email link to have

the user login and authenticate themselves then the attacker can hijack the session using the session ID (OWASP, 2020).

There are multiple methods used to acquire session ID's to use for session fixation. Session sniffing, the use of packet sniffing software to intercept session packets and acquire the session ID attached to it, this can be done manually by the attacker or the attacker may use malware to automate the process. The attacker may also brute force the ID's by going through all possible permutations of the ID.

The threat actors likely to use session hijackers are the same as stated above in 2.1. The risk posed by these attacks are: the attackers would be able to gain access to a user authenticated login and perform any actions that the user would be able to within that session such as a money transfer, the attacker would also have access to any personal information that the session allows the user to view which may lead to ID theft, the attacker may encrypt valuable/vital data for ransom which could include intellectual property.

The main methods to mitigate session hijacking attacks include: making session ID's long and complex to avoid brute force access, make the site use a new session for each time a user logs in and give each new session a unique ID to stop access if a previously used ID has been compromised, ensure that a session is closed once a user logs out or if the session is not being used and times out and finally, all session data should be encrypted to prevent sniffing and malware attacks from accessing the session ID's. Another method of mitigation extraneous to any technical measures would include the training of end users to spot and avoid phishing emails.

The addition of any of the mentioned mitigations would have very little affect on the end users as the mitigations proposed are mainly secure by design techniques that are more concerned with backend interaction. Usability will not be sacrificed to a noticeable degree, the only affect on the user would be the requirement to always log back into the system once they leave as the session they previously used would have been closed.

## **3 Part 2**

## **4 Conclusion**

## **References**

OWASP (2020). [https://owasp.org/www-community/attacks/Session\\_fixation](https://owasp.org/www-community/attacks/Session_fixation).

## A Appendix A

## A.1 Account Enumeration Mitigation

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**Algorithm 1**  $\text{login}(\text{username}, \text{password})$  **return**  $\text{response}$

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**Require:**  $\text{username}$ , the username for login

**Require:**  $\text{password}$ , the password for login

**Require:**  $\text{users}$ , the set of users and passwords that the system will compare the login against

**Ensure:**  $\text{response}$ , either a successful login or a response message

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1:  $\text{Failure} \leftarrow \text{"The username/password is incorrect"}$ 
2: for all  $\text{user}$  in  $\text{users}$  do
3:   if  $\text{username} = \text{user.username}$  then
4:     if  $\text{password} = \text{user.password}$  then
5:        $\text{response} \leftarrow \text{Success}$                                 ▷ Username and password correct
6:     else
7:        $\text{response} \leftarrow \text{Failure}$                                 ▷ Username correct, password incorrect
8:     end if
9:   else
10:     $\text{delay}$                                                         ▷ Wait however long the check for the password would take
11:     $\text{response} \leftarrow \text{Failure}$                                 ▷ Username and password incorrect
12:   end if
13: end for
14: return  $\text{response}$ 
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Figure 1: Example of a login with account enumeration mitigation included

## B Appendix B