Intelligence Insights: April 2022

THE RED CANARY TEAM

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Each month, the Intel team provides Red Canary customers with an analysis of trending, emerging, or otherwise important threats that we've encountered in confirmed threat detections, intelligence reporting, and elsewhere over the preceding month. We call this report our "Intelligence Insights" and share a public version of it with the broader infosec community.

Highlights

As we've done for the past few months, we again looked at the 10 most prevalent threats encountered in the environments that Red Canary monitors. These prevalence rankings are based on the number of unique customer environments in which we observed each threat. Here's how the numbers shook out for March 2022:

MARCH RANK	THREAT NAME	PERCENT OF CUSTOMERS AFFECTED
↑ 1	Impacket	1.5%
→ 2	**Mimikatz**	1.0%
↑ 2*	Yellow Cockatoo	1.0%
↑ 4*	**Cobalt Strike**	0.9%
↑ 4*	BloodHound	0.9%

↑ 6*	Shlayer	0.7%
↑ 6*	**Emotet**	0.7%
↓ 9	**Qbot**	0.6%
↓ 10*	SocGholish	0.5%
↓ 10*	Gamarue	0.5%
↑ 10*	Bondat	0.5%

↑ = trending up from previous month
↓= trending down from previous month
→ = no change in rank from previous month

*Denotes a tie

Observations on trending threats

Overall threat volume remained steady in March, matching February's numbers with 14.3 percent of Red Canary customers encountering at least one detection associated with a named threat we track. **SocGholish** relinquished the top spot, retreating to the volume we typically saw throughout most of 2021. The return of **Yellow Cockatoo** in February fueled a strong rebound by this prevalent threat, as it soared back up the ranks near the volume we encountered in 2021. **Gootkit**, another typical top 10 mainstay, disappeared entirely from our view in March. Gootkit relies on trojanized search engine optimization (SEO) social engineering techniques, similar to Yellow Cockatoo.

teams, we have observed multiple threats leverage it in intrusions, some leading to ransomware. The numbers underlying the prevalence rankings do not distinguish red teaming from in-the-wild adversary activity. Therefore, the presence of popular tools employed by testers—such as **Impacket**, Mimikatz, **Cobalt Strike**, and **BloodHound**—are not surprising to see in this list.

MSI phishing lures deliver Qbot

In April 2022, researchers reported on new tradecraft associated with campaigns delivering **Qbot**, **a known ransomware precursor**. For the first time, researchers saw Qbot delivered via malicious Windows Installer (MSI) packages, suggesting that at least one subset of operators may be experimenting with new ways to evade victims' defenses. The recent Qbot campaigns leveraging Windows Installer packages are a deviation from past campaigns, where Qbot was delivered via malicious Microsoft Office macros. In both cases, the malicious dropper is delivered via phishing emails with password-protected ZIP archives sent as attachments.

Qbot is a mature malware threat with a range of capabilities that allow adversaries to conduct reconnaissance, move laterally on an infected network, exfiltrate data, or deliver other tools. Multiple adversaries have leveraged Qbot in compromises that quickly progressed to additional threats, including ransomware. Accordingly, it's critical to identify changes in Qbot behavior (and the procedures that adversaries use to deploy it) to enable quick detection and response to known infections.

This most recent change in tradecraft may be a response to ongoing efforts by defenders to disable certain macros by default. While multiple groups carry out operations involving Qbot, delivery tradecraft **has been consistent** over time, across various adversaries. In past campaigns, adversaries used weaponized Microsoft Office documents, which were embedded with malicious macros and delivered via phishing campaigns. Upon macro execution, victims downloaded and executed a Qbot payload, typically without knowing it. Though this was effective for several years, this approach largely relied on victims allowing the macros to run. Earlier this year, **Microsoft announced** that VBA macros obtained from the internet would be blocked by default. There is **some speculation** that changes to Qbot delivery mechanisms may be in response to this effort. Microsoft's move to allow **AMSI telemetry for XLM macros** likely means that adversaries are having to explore additional avenues for malware distribution, as previously reliable macro methods are becoming unavailable.

Detection opportunity: `regsvr32.exe` **spawning `explorer.exe` as a child process**

When Qbot payloads delivered via MSI execute successfully, `explorer.exe` will spawn from `regsvr32`. This detection opportunity identifies `regsvr32.exe` spawning `explorer.exe` as a child process.

process_is_likely == `regsvr32`
&&
has_childproc == `true`
&&
childproc_is_likely == `explorer`

LOOK FAMILIAR?

If you've run into any of these behaviors on your environment, let us know!

→

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