

In the Media

SEP 8, 2009 by Ursachi Cosmin - 4 comments

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Browser extensions may be used by cybercriminals



In today's world of Internet security suites and firewalls, cybercriminals have discovered a new way to breach our defense, or rather go around it.

Security experts in Singapore say that browser extensions may soon become the new weapon cybercriminals will use to get into our computers.

During an interview with ZDNet Asia, Doug Browne, general manager of Security-Assessment.com said:

"Cybercriminals are likely to work on gaining the trust of users that download such extensions to enhance their Web experience, and only show their true colors much later."

"Initially, it will be just an extension you can use...[it] provides great functionality and therefore more and more people start using it."

"In a later release--[in the form of an update]--it will load malicious code onto [the user's] machine."

Such a scenario is real and this tactic might already be used by crime syndicates.

Out of all browsers, Firefox will be the most affected by this new vulnerability. Firefox extensions are immensely popular and according to Mozilla's Web site, over 1.5 billion extensions have been downloaded, of which around 160 million are in use.

In the latest survey, Firefox has around 23 percent share of the browser population, and 80 percent of installations run extensions.

Security-Assessment.com recently revealed that out of the nine or 10 Firefox extensions tested, all of them were vulnerable to attacks. The extensions tested were among the highest ranked, and may even be "recommended" by Mozilla.

Mr. Doug Browne, continued to say:

"As it is, Firefox extensions are proving to be vulnerable. Three of the vulnerabilities have already been publicly disclosed; the respective developers have been alerted to the remaining holes.

One of the extensions led to credit card numbers and online banking credentials being exposed.

As the creator and distributor of Firefox, Mozilla tests the functional aspects of an extension, not security. Even when the add-on appears to be "recommended from Mozilla", it has not been subject to any security testing.

They don't actually see whether there's any malicious code--whether there's a vulnerability in the code that can be exploited to gain access to [users'] information."

In a reply by email, Nick Nguyen, Mozilla's director of add-ons pointed out that:

"All public add-ons on add-ons.mozilla.org are code reviewed by an editor for code quality and security.

We continuously improve the tools that our editors use to find security flaws in add-ons, and we work with our top developers to conduct code audits on reviewed add-ons and provide advice to developers to help improve existing code."

We continue to be closely attuned to our community and do our best to react quickly when issues are found."

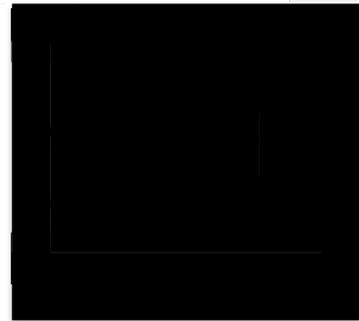
Security experts agree that this new vulnerability will cause a lot of trouble for browser extensions users, if the problem is not fixed soon.

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