6 DEC 2011 NEWS

Scareware is back to spook, swindle users, warns Enigma

The summer 'holiday' was the result of an international crackdown on scareware cybercrime rings carried out in June. Twelve countries collaborated in an anti-cybercrime effort to shut down two crime rings that caused more than $72 million in losses to over 900,000 people. In addition, the Russian police arrested Pavel Vrublevsky, co-founder of Chrono-Pay, the online payment processor for several large scareware scams. So the scammers were not able to process credit card transactions.

That appeared to stem the tide for the summer months, as scareware traffic plummeted, according to Enigma Software figures. But it's tough to keep a profitable criminal enterprise down for long.

"Scareware has been very active in September, and that activity increased tremendously around Thanksgiving", said Alvin Estevez with Enigma Software. "We are really seeing a lot of this rogue anti-virus program coming back stronger than ever", he told *Infosecurity*.

While malware infections are not up to pre-crackdown levels, there are some aggressive scareware campaigns underway.

The largest number of infections now is coming from System Fix, the second largest is called Cloud AV 2012, and the third is Win 7 Security 2012. These three infections are "insidious" because they lock the machine. They do not let the victim open up any programs, Estevez said.

"These are three different families; it is almost like a mafia", Estevez explained. And these families make an offer to customers that they can't refuse: "protection" against viruses.

The families found a way around not having a company to process their credit card payments. "Somehow they figured out that if they go into affiliated networks, like Plimus or Clickback, and they are able to process these cards. When they made that switch, they came right back", Estevez explained.

Estevez is not confident that another law enforcement crackdown would work because many of the scareware makers are located in Russia. "The FBI would never get cooperation from the Russian authorities. They would never let the FBI arrest Russian nationals on Russian soil because the Russian government doesn't care that these guys are publishing malware", he judged.

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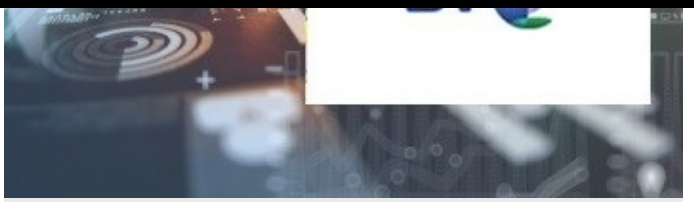

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