



THE MALWARE REPORT

Will White Hat Hackers Save the Day?

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The Malware Report Transcript

Title: Will White Hat Hackers Save the Day?

Episode: 121

Location: http://www.eset.com/podcasts/042109_ESET_White_Hat.mp3

May 14, 2009

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Matt Grant: Hi, this is Matt Grant, and you're listening to The Malware Report with Randy Abrams live from the 2009 RSA Conference. Hi Randy, thanks for being here.

Randy Abrams: Thanks Matt. It's great to be here for the podcast, conference and tradeshow.

Matt Grant: Absolutely. As many of us know, RSA is one of the largest security conferences of its kind and so we wanted to spend some time today talking about the show and about some security news as well. Let's start with this announcement that the Department of Homeland Security recently made regarding the White Hat hackers. Can you give us a description on White Hat hackers versus Black Hat hackers?

Randy Abrams: If you remember the old Western, the bad guys always dressed in black and had a black hat; the good guys dressed in white and wore a

white hat. There are a variety of different kinds of hackers; the guys that break the law are the Black Hats and the guys that are defending companies are the White Hats – the good guys. The DHS is looking to hire White Hat hackers that can, quote unquote, “think like the bad guy” and know how to use the different network tools and know about security.

Matt Grant: Absolutely. Good guy, bad guy. Their skill set, is that similar?

Randy Abrams: It can be. It’s just like any profession; you have all kinds of people with all kinds of skill sets. Some people are cool, some can be bad. There’s really nothing different about a hacker, they can have good skills or bad skills.

Matt Grant: Now I know they’re trying to beef up the cybersecurity of the United States. Will this work?

Randy Abrams: This will definitely help I believe. Having really sharp, good people looking at what is vulnerable, noticing anomalies and patterns that indicate the infrastructure is under attack is only going to be good stuff for us.

Matt Grant: Do they have this now or do they have any type of White Hat hacker in place?

Randy Abrams: They do it have it to some extent. However, there was a recent budget request to increase the number of these types of people they can hire and train from about 80 a year to 250 a year for the next two years. It’s important that they get these talented and ethical people.

Matt Grant: Absolutely. It sounds like they are listening. I know ESET recently announced a poll saying that more than 65% of people in the U.S. want more involvement from the government to fight cybercrime; this seems to go along with that statistic. What are they going to be doing specifically to stay one step ahead of the bad guys?

Randy Abrams: It’s interesting; you have to think like the bad guy. There’s this myth that it’s a good idea to hire the bad guy because they know how the

bad guys think. The only difference between a good guy and a bad guy is the actions, what they actually do. It's not that a bad guy is smarter or knows different tricks, he's got different motivations. When you hire some people and say, "I want you to break into this network," but they're allowed to do it, they're not breaking the law. They'll be just as creative as the bad guy. They are going to be motivated and have the same potential skills and if they're better at it, they have better skills. It's not that they are good or bad. Just because someone broke the law, it doesn't mean he is smart or talented.

Matt Grant: Absolutely. Are the White Hat hackers reformed Black Hat hackers?

Randy Abrams: I think some of them are. Some of the Black Hat hackers will never be reformed. Lots and lots of the White Hat hackers will never have to be Black Hats to begin with.

Matt Grant: Absolutely. Do you foresee the good guys prevailing in this battle? Where do you see us now as opposed to two years from now once they have a lot of the White Hat hackers in place?

Randy Abrams: The battle is going to go on forever. 4,000 years ago crimes existed; we respond to crime, it's an ongoing part of our society. I think we will be a little less behind when we catch up on the Internet curve because the bad guys jumped out ahead to exploit the criminal activities that are possible on the Internet. Now we're playing catch up to have law enforcement and security deal with the crimes.

Matt Grant: In closing, how important is this with our nation's infrastructure so on technology and the Internet. How important is it to have this in place and to start beefing up our efforts as a nation in cybersecurity?

Randy Abrams: It is absolutely critical. You can take down power grids, banks and the stock market, things essential for security. If someone really wants to hurt us, it's really easy if someone fires a rocket at our country, we know who to fire rockets back at. But when you're cloaked on the

Internet and you do something really bad, it can cause a lot of damage and it can be difficult to find who to take out to stop it.

Matt Grant:

Well Randy, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today at the 2009 RSA Conference in San Francisco. If you have additional questions, you can ask Randy at askeset@eset.com. This has been Matt Grant and you're listening to the Malware report.

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