New FireEye Email Threat Report Underlines the Rise in Malware-Less Email Attacks

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FireEye research reveals two-thirds of email traffic wasn't 'clean' during the first half of 2018

MILPITAS, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep. 12, 2018-- FireEye, Inc. (NASDAQ: FEYE), the intelligence-led security company, today released the results of its Email Threat Report. Based on the analysis of a sample set of over half-a-billion emails from 1H 2018, FireEye found that less than a third (32%) of email traffic seen in the first half of 2018 was considered 'clean' and actually delivered to an inbox. The report also found that 1 in every 101 emails had malicious intent. When compared to the previous six-month period[1], the changes in both these numbers depict that the email landscape continues to see an increase in email-based threats.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20180912005256/en/

"Not only is email the most pervasive form of communication, it is also the most popular vector for cyberattacks. This makes email the biggest vulnerability for every organization," said Ken Bagnall, vice president of email security at FireEye. "From malware to malware-less attacks including impersonation attacks like CEO fraud, a single malicious email can cause significant brand damage and financial losses. By choosing an email security solution with features based on real-time knowledge gained from the frontlines, and by teaching users to always ensure they are communicating with who they think they are, organizations can better defend against attacks."

Email reliance continues; cyber criminals adapt

With email security solutions focused on detecting malware, cyber criminals are now adapting their attacks, exposing organizations to malware-less assaults such as CEO fraud. In fact, the majority of attacks blocked (90%) during analysis were malware-less, with phishing attacks alone making up 81% of the blocked malware-less emails, almost doubling from January to June 2018. Data also indicates that phishing attacks will continue to rise, while impersonation attacks (which were at 19%) remain relatively proportional to the total number of attacks seen. With it only taking one email to potentially impact an entire organization, the protection of this data must be taken seriously.

Other notable email attack trends

While the overall number of attacks stayed fairly consistent each month during the evaluated six-month period, a few notable trends stuck out relative to when and how attackers struck:

- Relative to malware-based attacks, Mondays and Wednesdays were most common
- Malware-less attacks were most likely to occur on a Thursday including domain name spoofing and attacks using a spoofed friendly user name, with the exception of newly existing domains which peaked on Wednesdays instead
- Impersonation attacks were most likely to fall on a Friday
- When it comes to the weekend, malware-less attacks continued to be more prevalent than malware-based attacks, with domain name spoofing attacks and newly existing domains being the most likely among them

Methodology & resources

The FireEye Email Threat Report is the result of FireEye's analysis of a sample set of over half-a-billion emails from January through June 2018. For more information about ever-evolving malware and malware-less email attacks, in-depth analysis of impersonation attacks and the current tactics being used by the cyber criminals, check out this infographic, or download the full FireEye Email Threat Report.

For details on how FireEye Email Security protects users against advanced email threats, including phishing, impersonation and spam, visit www.fireeye.com/email.

About FireEye, Inc.

FireEye is the intelligence-led security company. Working as a seamless, scalable extension of customer security operations, FireEye offers a single platform that blends innovative security technologies, nation-state grade threat intelligence, and world-renowned Mandiant® consulting. With this approach, FireEye eliminates the complexity and burden of cyber security for organizations struggling to prepare for, prevent, and respond to cyber attacks. FireEye has over 7,100 customers across 67 countries, including more than 45 percent of the Forbes Global 2000.

[1]FireEye data from July through December 2017 revealed that 1 in every 131 emails was of malicious intent, and 'clean' email reaching the inbox was slightly higher at 34%.

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