

Is Your Computer Committing Cybercrimes?



AP

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Last week, we told you about efforts by Microsoft Corporation to stop Zeus, one of the most harmful cybercrime operations active today. Zeus hackers use a network of infected computers, known as botnets, to steal personal information from computer users.

On March twenty-third, officials seized computer servers in two states, Pennsylvania and Illinois. The servers were said to be operating some of the worst known Zeus botnets.

Richard Boscovich is with the Digital Crimes Unit at Microsoft. He says the operators of the servers did not know they were linked to cybercrime.

RICHARD BOSCOVICH: "The hosting providers in and of themselves are not necessarily in cahoots with the criminals, so to speak. In the room that we walked into there were over ten thousand computers. So their business is simply to host customers."

Zeus botnets are positioned all over the world. Mr. Boscovich says they act as command and control centers for the infected computers.

RICHARD BOSCOVICH: "It's not just one botnet but probably hundreds of different botnets that come from this particular code base."

And, he says, the Zeus botnets are not easy to identify.

RICHARD BOSCOVICH: "These command and control centers are constantly moving. So it takes a lot of effort to be able to identify where they were, or where they are and where they are going to be."

Microsoft says it is studying information gathered from the servers that were seized last month. It hopes to gather more evidence against the unidentified Zeus operators. It also hopes to identify and notify the more than thirteen million computer users that have been infected with the Zeus malware.

Mr. Boscovich says there are many things that users can and should do to protect themselves from harmful software programs. At the very least, he says, they should be using legitimate software that has been purchased from creditable providers. And he says every computer must have current anti-virus software.

Most of all, Mr. Boscovich says, computer users must be careful about e-mails.

RICHARD BOSCOVICH: "The bad guys are extremely adept at sending emails that appear to be from friends, from family members or from banks or companies, in fact."

Microsoft is not alone in efforts to fight cybercrime. Security experts from CrowdStrike, Dell SecureWorks and other companies took down a large botnet known as Kelihos last month. As quickly as Kelihos was stopped, researchers say cybercriminals began working to build another botnet.

Also last month, the European Union announced steps to fight the growing problem of cybercrime. They include plans to establish a new cybercrimes center, to be based in The Hague. The center will deal with issues like misuse of credit card information, identity theft and the sexual abuse of children online.

And, that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.