Livestreaming calls for greater awareness of security measures

Following the recent announcement by Nicola Mendelsohn that in five years time Facebook "will be definitely mobile, it will probably be all video. The questions being asked is, is video slowly killing text?"

"The best way to tell stories in this world, where so much information is coming at us, actually is video," added Mendelsohn, who heads up Facebook's operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. "It conveys so much more information in a much quicker period. So the trend helps us to digest much more information."

Although the adoption of livestreaming and video technology amongst South Africans is coming of age, it is still based on two factors – content and cost, points out Anton Jacobsz, MD of value-added distributor, Networks Unlimited. "Livestreaming is changing the way we interact with friends, news, music, sport and so much more – from a social media site or any other internet site.

© Pixabay

"However, not all sites are created equal when it comes to their inherent security measures and so, watching something live via your laptop, smartphone or any other connected device also poses security risks."

Jacobsz highlights researchers from the University of KU Leuven in Belgium and Stony Brook University in the US, both of whom used one of their homegrown tools to identify and analyse livestreaming sites and found that there is a 50% chance the so-called 'overlay' ads that accompany sites that offer free livestreaming of sporting events, concerts are malicious.

The research, entitled 'It's Free for a Reason: Exploring the Ecosystem of Free Live Streaming Services', analysed more than 23,000 free streaming websites across 5,600 domain names, 50% of which ranked within the one million most popular websites in the world.

"The ads are often disguised as 'play' buttons, which attempt to fool users into downloading software, often from recognisable brand names in the space, and claim it is necessary to download it in order to play the stream," continues Heidi Bleau, principal integrated marketing manager at RSA, the security division of EMC, a Networks Unlimited partner in the region.

Half the ads contain malware

She explains that the researchers then used their system to revisit these sites 850,000 times, analysing more than a terabyte of traffic. From those visits, they discovered that as many as half of the advertisements presented to users trying assiduously to avoid having to pay for pricey pay-per-view events were malicious. They exposed viewers to potential risks such as identity and data theft as well as financial scams.

"For those who aren't aware (and even for those who are), many overlay adverts on livestreaming sports, fan, concerts and music downloads sites have fake close buttons or close buttons that move when a mouse hovers over them. Because of these adverts, many users are unknowingly exposed to malware. Further, clicking on any of these ads can prompt a direct (albeit unintended) download of unwanted software into your browser and PC that may audit and store your keystrokes or even spy on your activities," adds Bleau.

Not surprisingly, say the researchers, a livestream's sponsors are often complicit in these frauds.

These livestreaming websites are simply another vehicle used by fraudsters to deliver malware. "In addition, great efforts are put in to ensure the design is almost identical to the actual free livestreaming sites, further tricking users into believing that this 'new' site is merely an extension of the original one. Not even anti-virus or ad-blocker software extensions are enough to protect consumers, as the malware uploaded onto these sites has been purpose-built to try to defeat them.

"Whatever you choose to do, just realise that when you decide to binge on free livestreaming events in order to avoid paying for them, sooner or later you may wind up paying for it in an entirely unexpected way including identity, data or financial theft," warns Bleau.

The writing may be on the wall for the scripted word, but livestreaming certainly brings a whole vocabulary of new terms to a site and calls for greater awareness about security and security measurements.

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com