

Microsoft Says SolarWinds Hackers Accessed Some of Its Source Code



Microsoft revealed that the threat actors behind the SolarWinds supply chain attack were able to gain access to a small number of internal accounts and escalate access inside its internal network.

The “very sophisticated nation-state actor” used the unauthorized access to view, but not modify, the source code present in its repositories, the company said. “We detected unusual activity with a small number of internal accounts and upon review, we discovered one account had been used to view source code in a number of source code repositories,” the Windows maker disclosed in an update.

“The account did not have permissions to modify any code or engineering systems and our investigation further confirmed no changes were made. These accounts were investigated and remediated.”

The development is the latest in the far-reaching espionage saga that came to light earlier in December following revelations by cybersecurity firm FireEye that attackers had compromised its systems via a trojanized SolarWinds update to steal its Red Team penetration testing tools.

During the course of the probe into the hack, Microsoft had previously admitted to detecting malicious SolarWinds binaries in its own environment but denied its systems were used to target others or that attackers had access to production services or customer data.

Several other companies, including Cisco, VMware, Intel, NVIDIA, and a number of other US government agencies, have since discovered markers of the Sunburst (or Solorigate) malware on their networks, planted via tainted Orion updates. The Redmond-based company said its investigation is still ongoing but downplayed the incident, adding “viewing source code isn’t tied to elevation of risk” and that it had found evidence of attempted activities that were neutralized by its protections.

In a separate analysis published by Microsoft on December 28, the company called the attack a “cross-domain compromise” that allowed the adversary to introduce malicious code into signed SolarWinds Orion Platform binaries and leverage this widespread foothold to continue operating undetected and access the target’s cloud resources, culminating in the exfiltration of sensitive data.

SolarWinds’ Orion software, however, wasn’t the only initial infection vector, as the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said the attackers used other methods as well, which have not yet been publicly disclosed.

The agency also released supplemental guidance urging all US federal agencies that still run SolarWinds Orion software to update to the latest 2020.2.1 HF2 version. “The National Security Agency (NSA) has examined this version and verified that it eliminates the previously identified malicious code,” the agency said.

Adobe Flash Player is Finally Laid to Rest

Adobe Flash Player, the browser plug-in that brought rich animations and interactivity to the early web, has officially reached the end of its life. Released in 1996, Flash was once one of the most popular ways for people to stream videos and play games online. But it was plagued with security problems and failed to transition to the smartphone era.

Adobe will no longer offer security updates for Flash and has urged people to uninstall it. It will also stop videos and animations running in its Flash Player as of January 12th.

Why was Flash popular?

When Flash was first released, a majority of internet users connected via dial-up connections that were very slow by today's standards. But Flash let web designers and animators deliver exciting content that could be downloaded relatively quickly. "You could make a full three-minute animation with multiple characters, backgrounds, sounds and music less than 2 megabytes (MB) and viewable from within the browser," explained animator David Firth.

His surreal animations and characters - such as the gangly, green hunchback Salad Fingers - enjoyed viral success before the advent of social media. "I just made the stuff I wanted to see that I felt was missing: dark, surreal comedy," he told the BBC.

"There were no shortcuts to viral content. No corporate fingers twiddling the algorithms. It was simply attention-grabbing and quality material that rose to the top."

Sites such as Newgrounds - described as "the YouTube of Flash" by Mr Firth - sprung up to serve the growing demand for cartoons and interactive games. "It was the first website I'd ever seen that allowed anyone to post content and it be available in real time. If the community felt the content was low quality, it would get removed at the end of the day so you actually had to take that into account when posting," he said.

What happened?

Flash was about more than just animations - it also let websites such as YouTube stream high-quality video. By 2009, Adobe said Flash was installed on 99% of internet-connected desktop PCs. But by then the world was shifting towards mobile devices and Adobe was slow to react.



"We had optimised for lower-end phones with Flash Lite," explains David Mendels, former executive vice president of products at Adobe. "It was incredibly successful in places like Japan, but it wasn't the same as the full desktop Flash. It wasn't fully compatible."

In April 2010, Apple's Steve Jobs wrote a blistering open letter headlined Thoughts On Flash, in which he laid out why Apple would not let Flash run on iPhones and iPads. Flash, he argued, was cumbersome to use on a touchscreen, unreliable, a security threat and a drain on battery life. He said videos and animations could instead be delivered with HTML5 and other open technologies, making Flash redundant on a smartphone or tablet.

"When the iPhone came out, Flash wasn't quite ready," Mr Mendels told the BBC. "But also I think Apple wanted to create an Apple-only ecosystem." Eventually, Adobe did get a version of its Flash Player working on smartphones. But the internet had moved on.

Big brands such as Facebook, Netflix and YouTube were already streaming videos to smartphones without Flash and in November 2011 Adobe ended development of Flash for mobile devices. It continued to produce Flash for desktop computers, but the software suffered from multiple security flaws.

In 2015, Apple disabled the plug-in in its Safari web browser by default, and Google's Chrome started blocking some pieces of Flash content. In July 2017, Adobe announced that it would retire Flash in 2020. It said other technologies, such as HTML5 had matured enough to provide a "viable alternative", without requiring users to install and update a dedicated plug-in.

How can I remove Flash from my computer?

Adobe has provided instructions for removing Flash on Windows and Mac computers on its website.

It has warned: "Uninstalling Flash Player will help to secure your system since Adobe does not intend to issue Flash Player updates or security patches after the end-of-life date."

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-55497353>

PITG Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest

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January 2021

Every year before Christmas, we like to do an ugly sweater contest. This year's winner was Amy Horne!



5 TECHNOLOGY TRENDS TO WATCH FOR IN 2021

Every year, the innovations unlocked by technology seem to appear faster and faster. But the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated technology in a way we have never seen before. Different from the dot-com boom, Covid-19 has forced businesses to adjust not by choice, but by necessity. Here are five tech trends to keep an eye on in 2021.

- 1. Esports** - According to Deloitte's 2020 digital media trends survey, "During the crisis, a third of consumers have, for the first time, subscribed to a video gaming service, used a cloud gaming service, or watched esports or a virtual sporting event." Furthermore, in previous years, Deloitte had found that "a quarter of consumers rank playing video games as one of their three favorite entertainment activities." And for millennials and Gen Z consumers, playing video games is in their top three favorite activities.
- 2. Wearable Technology** - Wearables have been on the rise for the past five years or so. But the whole narrative changed in March when, suddenly, people could no longer go to the gym. Companies like Peloton defined our "new normal," and at-home athletics became synonymous with smart workout devices, wearables, and remote competitions and leaderboards — with everyone tuning in from their living rooms.
- 3. Blockchain Technology And Cryptocurrencies** - While much of the hype from 2017 about blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies has died down in the mainstream media, the past few years have been incredibly productive for these industries. For example, the SEC commissioner recently made a statement saying innovation is welcome and that publicly traded stocks may very well become tokenized in the future.
- 4. Artificial Intelligence For Creativity** - In just the past few years, the conversation surrounding the future of artificial intelligence has expanded outside the realm of machines being able to process information and equations to also include the possibility of creative output. How people choose to use these new tools and technologies, however, is what will ultimately create and redefine our most artistic industries — photography, music, film, art, graphic design, branding, marketing and beyond.
- 5. Digital Health** - Healthcare is known for being a slower-to-adjust industry, but after being so heavily accelerated over the past year due to Covid-19, the innovation here is no longer a choice — it's a necessity. A terrific report by the World Health Organization explains what the next five years of digital health innovation can look like and what the industry's strategy should be for utilizing these new technologies: "The vision of the global strategy is to improve health for everyone, everywhere by accelerating the development and adoption of appropriate, affordable, scalable, and sustainable digital health solutions." This includes smart and connected devices, advanced computing, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and robotics.

If there's one thing the Covid-19 pandemic has shown society at large, it's how quickly we can adapt, innovate and create when we need to. And as technology continues to embed itself into every facet of our everyday lives, our "new normal" will continue to evolve faster and faster.

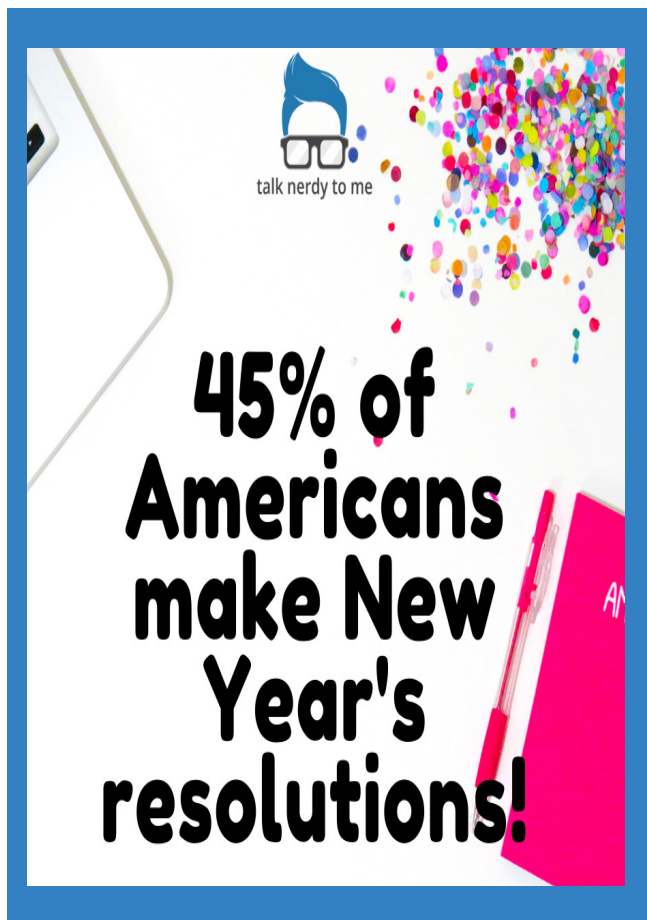
Source: [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com)



We had so much fun with Holly last month! She was extra mischevious with the limited staff in the office to catch her.

We are sad to see her go but she has important work to do in the North Pole with Santa. See you next Christmas Holly!

FUN FACT!



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