

INTERNET ADS WITH MALWARE AND VIRUSES



The internet has become a popular piece of technology over the past two decades, which means advertising companies have trouble keeping their ads clean. One advertising problem has taken a turn for the worse these days, with ads being laced with viruses and vicious malware that hurts computer hard drives.

According to research done by RiskIQ, infected ads on the internet have increased tenfold over the last year alone. In May of 2010, there were 1,533 incidences of malvertisements. In May of 2011, there were 14,694 incidences of malvertisements. Depending on how long the advertisement was running, it could have affected anywhere from thousands to millions of website visitors' computers.

"In 2011 we observed malvertisements on major sites such as weather.com, foxsports.com, monster.com and usnews.com, just to name a few," Elias Manousos, CEO of RiskIQ, says.

"Malvertisements are a popular and extremely effective mechanism that take advantage of weaknesses within Web browsers," says Vincent Liu, managing partner of security consultancy Stach & Liu. "The average home computer user faces a high risk of being attacked by malvertisements."

Criminals selling tutorials on the internet about how to create malvertisements have been caught by Armorize. "There is a whole ecosystem designed to do this," says Matt Huang, Armorize's chief operating officer. "It's all automated and all on the Internet."

Doug Suttles, the chief operating officer for Ookla, SpeedTest's parent company, said the following about the advertisements:

"Most websites aren't as on top of this as we are," says Suttles. "We were surprised someone got in. We quickly stripped it out and locked things down."

Huang also added that tens of thousands of other websites using OpenX's ad-handling platform are susceptible to new types of malvertisement attacks.

"Publishers are seeing their traffic and transactions drop in real time," says Huang. "They are seeing an immediate financial impact from warnings appearing all over Twitter not to visit their site."

The Online Publishers Association, a group of website publishers, has not begun to investigate malvertising yet.

"Obviously, stuff like this is disconcerting to the industry," says Pam Horan, OPA's president. "We haven't done any research in this area, and I haven't specifically heard anything from the members about this."

It has become more and more difficult recently for publishers to validate advertisements that have been placed on their websites.

"The process isn't flawless, and thus malvertisements end up running in the wild," says Manousos. "I think awareness is growing and more players in the ad supply chain are committed to working on reducing the number of malvertisements that reach the public."

Craig Spiezle, the Online Trust Association's executive director, had the following to say about malvertisements:

"The good news there is growing interest of some of the key stakeholders — including Yahoo, Microsoft and Google — on the need to employ countermeasures," says Spiezle. "It's clear that validating the ads everyone depends on is a shared responsibility. If consumers don't trust ads, they may not go to the site, or they'll start running ad blockers, and that will compromise everyone's ability to monetize."