Consumer Spyware

Privacy, Data Protection, Surveillance, Domestic Surveillance, Espionage, Software, Malware, Spyware, Information Security, Consumer Spyware, Stalkerware

Consumer spyware, also stalkerware, or spouseware, is a malware family that can be used to spy on domestic targets such as family members, partners, and spouses. Starting from around $20 USD for a monthly subscription the software is relatively cheap. It can be installed on cellphones and other computers to intercept calls, chat messages in applications like Facebook, WhatsApp or iMessage, remotely switch on a phone's microphone, submit a phone's location by reading its GPS data, and capture a user's web browsing history.

A major concern, apart from the initial privacy invasion, is that the captured data maybe transmitted and stored at the company that provides the spyware. This raises the risk of private, possibly compromising data such as chats, text messages, photos, video clips, being unintentionally shared with third parties, for example in the event of a data breach.

Data Breaches

In a recent security breach of two vendors of such software, Retina-X and FlexiSpy, names and email addresses of 130.000 users were leaked. One of the largest companies in the field, mSpy, has around two million subscribers.

After having been hacked a second time by the same person who gained access to photographs stored with two of Retina-X's apps, TeenShield an PhoneSheriff, the company announced on 5 March 2018 that it is »immediately and indefinitely halting« all of its services.

Sources

Retina-X website (Memento: https://archive.fo/74Aj5)

FlexiSpy website (Memento: https://archive.fo/47JJt)

Motherboard: ›Stalkerware‹ Seller Shuts Down Apps ›Indefinitely‹ After Getting Hacked Again (Memento: https://archive.fo/tYaqB)

Motherboard: Inside the ›Stalkerware‹ Surveillance Market, Where Ordinary People Tap Each Other's Phones (Memento: https://archive.fo/zkDN5)

The Atlantic: The Adultery Arms Race (Memento: https://archive.fo/R1LJx)
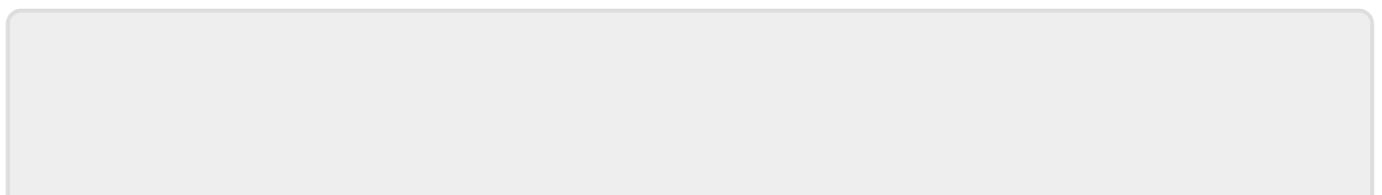
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Last update: **2018/03/09 19:52**