Hot Clicks: Beware Cryptojacking Miners

Rounding up IT and advanced tech-related news impacting government and industry.

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They are now the newest cyber threat to look out for, according to the Global Threat Index by cybersecurity firm Check Point. The report found Coinhive, a software that uses processing power on someone’s device to mine cryptocurrency, is the most prevalent form of malware on the internet — and another “cryptojacking” malware, Cryptolook, was third.

These software steal someone else’s computing power by embedding a code in websites or software, and allow the user to use that power to mine cryptocurrencies, like bitcoin. Miners are typically compensated in digital
currencies, considering the computational demand required to do so.

Check Point said cryptojacking has affected as many as 55 percent of organizations globally, and can be found on websites, servers, PCs and mobile. Other security researchers at Wandera said cryptojacking events on mobile increased by 287 percent between October and November alone. The fear is this threat is becoming more prevalent than ransomware attacks like WannaCry, mainly because it provides an even better return of investment for hackers. Mining cryptocurrency has a guaranteed reward, and things like antivirus products aren’t helpful in this case.

MIT Technology Review

Sophia Was Gifted With Pair of Legs

As if her voice and face weren’t human-like enough — Hanson Robotics’ humanoid robot Sophia (who was granted citizenship by Saudi Arabia) can now walk, standing nearly 6-feet tall strutting some steps and dance moves. The artificial intelligence already has the face and facial gestures of a human, and her skin is made of material called “frubber” to look realistic. Now, she is capable of moving at a speed of up to 0.6 mph.

CEO of Hanson Robotics, David Hanson, said Sophia is viewed as an infant; part machine, part child, but with the vocabulary of an adult. She has a number of cognitive abilities, and with a more humanesque body and form, the company hopes Sophia will later have applications in areas like medical therapy or work with humans in factories. Still, she isn’t quite at the responsive and conversational level as virtual assistants like Amazon Alexa and Google; she’s partly scripted and partly AI. But now she can walk.

Cnet.com

Cool Google App Everyone Uses is Causing Privacy Concerns

You know, the one where you take a picture of your face and Google matches it to famous works of art that resemble you. It’s the find-your-art lookalike feature on the latest version of the Google Arts & Culture app, and though it’s been available since December, it has gone viral recently as more people and celebrities share their results on social media. Google matches a selfie you take directly on the app and pairs it against portraits pulled from more than 1,200 museums in over 70
countries. The app even reached the top spot on the iTunes App Store charts.

But what is Google doing with this facial data after it processes it?

The app uses machine learning to recognize the face in the selfie, even the position of the head, and compares it to its bank of art to find matches. It shows the percentage of the match, too. Google says the selfies are not being used to train machine learning programs or build a database of faces, according to *The Washington Post*. The company said it is not using the pictures for anything other than the art matches, and that the photos are only stored for the time it takes to find a match. But still, the feature isn’t available in Texas and Illinois, because the states forbid the use of facial recognition tech to identify people without their consent. *The Washington Post*

**Future of Shopping is Still Amazon**

The retail giant opened its surveillance-powered, cashierless, no-checkout convenience store in downtown Seattle, called the Go store (which is the size of a gas station mart). A shopper can walk in, pick up what he or she wants, and leave — without visiting a cashier or self-check out.

This is how *TechCrunch* explained the system: The store uses dozens of custom-made camera units on the ceiling covering every square inch of the store from different angles. The cameras are said to detect motion and basic object identification, and are accompanied by depth-sensing cameras hidden in the background. The images captured are sent to a central processing unit to identify different people in the store and what they are picking up and holding, which is then added to a virtual shopping cart.

Questions remain of how accurate the store system is, and how easy it is to shoplift. Amazon’s systems don’t use facial recognition, but instead, other visual cues, and watch for continuity between the cameras (so you’re never not in sight of a lens). The system watches a shopper move from one camera to the next to keep the connection. There are also weight sensors in the shelves and the system knows every item’s exact weight. So, the error rate could be low enough that Amazon is going with it anyway; but a few missed-item hiccups have already been logged. *TechCrunch*
Can Science Agencies Benefit from Smallsats?

A single, small satellite won’t provide NASA or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with complete seeing powers from space, but a bunch of them as a constellation could help. Large, Earth-observing satellites are really expensive, and constellations of smallsats send substantial data about Earth — and it’s all for sale.

Though these agencies already fly their own satellites, they are still exploring pilot data-purchase programs. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency has already signed data-subscription contracts with an Earth-imaging startup, but the hesitancy to go all-in stems from commercial smallsat companies’ inconsistency. According to Wired, they can come and go, and the data may change in quality or format.

For example, NOAA operates its own 17 larger satellites, with some valued at $500 million each. The agency doesn’t want to replace its assets, but rather, augment them. As part of its Commercial Weather Data Pilot Program, NOAA contracted two smallsat companies in 2016, Spire and GeoOptics, to provide atmospheric data for $1 million. However, the program didn’t completely work. By the 2017 deadline, only one company came through, so NOAA has since delayed part two of the program. The government interest is there, but the companies are still a bit too new. Wired

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