



Interested in learning
more about security?

SANS Institute InfoSec Reading Room

This paper is from the SANS Institute Reading Room site. Reposting is not permitted without express written permission.

FTP and the Warez Scene

Peer-to-peer file sharing systems, such as Gnutella, provide new ways to trade illegal software. However, software theft via FTP, Internet Relay Chat channels and bulletin boards still is prevalent. Open anonymous FTP sites on your network may be serving operating systems, application software, games, music, movies and more to users around the world. Although software theft via FTP is very common, the risk of FTP abuse can be reduced by scanning networks for anonymous FTP sites, monitoring FTP activity, and securing FT...

Copyright SANS Institute
Author Retains Full Rights



AD

FTP and the Warez Scene

Shelli Crocker

Abstract

Peer-to-peer file sharing systems, such as Gnutella, provide new ways to trade illegal software. However, software theft via FTP, Internet Relay Chat channels and bulletin boards still is prevalent. Open anonymous FTP sites on your network may be serving operating systems, application software, games, music, movies and more to users around the world.

Warez

Software theft exists in many forms: from a teen who copies a game for a friend, to a small office manager who installs a single-user application on ten workstations, to an organized crime ring that auctions illegal software on the Internet. But somewhere in this spectrum exists a vast underground software trading circle: the warez scene.

Warez is the term used for software that has been stripped of its copy protection and made available on the Internet for downloading.¹ Available warez include operating systems, applications, entertainment software (games, music, movies) and more. The warez community is an well-organized one, boasting its own search engines and Web rings to help end users locate what they want.² A recent FBI "Cyber Strike" investigation revealed that pirated software often appears on within a day of its public release and often before the manufacturer's official release. Pirate copies of nearly every major software release, as well as specialty items, are available. Software may be offered in exchange for uploads of other applications, or users may be charged a fee to join.³

There are several new peer-to-peer file-sharing systems, such as Gnutella, that provide ways to trade this illegal software. However, software theft via FTP, Internet Relay Chat channels and bulletin boards still is prevalent and should not be overlooked.

Open Anonymous FTP and FXP

Anonymous FTP may be the simplest way to transfer files via the Internet, but it is not without its problems. Abuse of anonymous FTP is quite common. The CERT Coordination Center first issued an advisory regarding anonymous FTP activity in 1993, citing a continuous stream of reports from sites that experience unwanted activities

¹ "Warez." Whatis?com: the IT-specific encyclopedia. 19 November 1999. URL: <http://whatis.techtarget.com/> (14 December 2000).

² Cuciz, David. "Software piracy report: Part III." URL: http://www.gamespy.com/legacy/artides/spr3_b.shtm (11 December 2000).

³ Wong, Wylie. "FBI targets BBS operators, seizes hardware in software piracy sting." 3 February 1997. Computerworld, 31(5), p24.

within their anonymous FTP areas. One type of activity noted is use of writable areas to transfer copyrighted software and other sensitive information.⁴

Hosting open anonymous FTP sites on your network is an invitation to piracy. The most common attacks found in firewall logs are scans looking for open anonymous FTP servers.⁵ Large companies and universities are popular targets due to their fast connections. Without those the warez scene wouldn't exist.⁶

There are many tutorials on the Web with detailed instructions to locate public FTP sites, or "pubs." Grim's Ping⁷ is recommended as the pub scanning tool of choice. The goal in locating a pub is to load it with items for downloads using "liberated" storage. Files may then be transferred between FTP servers using an FXP (File eXchange Protocol) utility, such as FlashFXP⁸. The advantage of using FXP is that the maximum transfer speed does not depend on your connection, but only on the connection between the two hosts.⁹ Files can be distributed around the Internet quickly and easily between pubs, making warez widely available.

Warning Signs

Signs of piracy on your network may not be obvious at first. FXPers take care to avoid detection. While scanning and creating pubs they may use a proxy server or a wingate to mask their source and identity. Most hide the directories they create by placing periods, spaces or tildes in the name.¹⁰ Pubs are posted via IRC channels, boards, newsgroups and mailing lists (many of which are accessible by invitation only). When using a pub, the golden rule is to behave as a guest; tampering with the system owner's files and directories increases the chance the activity will be discovered.¹¹

So what should you look for? The Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) offers seven warning signs of piracy:

1. Increased or even massive FTP file transfer in a directory
2. Expanded directory trees
3. Excessive data transfer in a single session

⁴ CERT Coordination Center. "CERT advisory CA-1993-10 anonymous FTP activity." CERT Advisories. 14 July 1993, rev. 8 October 1997. URL: <http://www.cert.org/advisories/CA-1993-10.html> (7 December 2000).

⁵ Graham, Robert. "FAQ: Firewall forensics." 20 June 2000. URL: <http://www.robertgraham.com/pubs/firewall-seen.html> (11 December 2000).

⁶ "FTP etiquette." Net Knowledge Base. URL: <http://www.netknowledgebase.com/tutorials/ftpetiquette.html> (7 December 2000).

⁷ "Grim's Ping: Making the everyday pub scanning faster and more reliable." 23 September 2000. URL: <http://grimsping.cjb.net> (7 December 2000).

⁸ "FlashFXP." 11 August 2000. URL: <http://flashfxp.phix-it.com> (11 December 2000).

⁹ DrPerf. "FXP Tutorial." Xtreme-FXP. URL: <http://www.directdownloads.net/Tutorials/FxP.htm> (30 November 2000).

¹⁰ "Tutorials." Ultimate FXP - The web's most complete FXP info source. 12 July 2000. URL: <http://www.ultimatefxp.f2s.com/tutorials/tutorial.htm> (7 December 2000).

¹¹ "Netiquette." Net Knowledge Base. URL: <http://www.netknowledgebase.com/tutorials/netiquette.html> (7 December 2000).

4. Sites labeled *Warez* or listed as involving *Cracker* or *Hacker* activity
5. The posting of serial numbers used to install software
6. Increased logging into an area
7. Numerous unusual or hidden files or directories¹²

When software piracy is discovered at your organization, SIIA provides the following advice: Review directories and files in accordance with policies and procedures that exist in your organization. Determine origin of access. Review files contents for reference to other sites or account/password combinations. Then notify sites identified, as these sites themselves may be compromised.¹³

Prevention

On a large network, new FTP sites spring up frequently. Inexperienced system administrators may run FTP services with default, open configurations. Power users may install FTP services on their desktop computers. Routine scans of your own network are essential to detect new FTP servers before the FXPers find them.

These problems notwithstanding, anonymous FTP can be a valuable service if correctly configured and administered. Sites should use of the most recent version of their FTP daemon. For example, the popular War FTP Daemon has a bug that allows unrestricted access to any file on the local machine.¹⁴ Directories, password and group files must be configured correctly. See CERT's anonymous FTP "tech tip" for details.¹⁵

Summary

Software theft via FTP, Internet Relay Chat channels and bulletin boards is very common on the Internet. Open anonymous FTP sites on your network may be serving operating systems, application software, games, music, movies and more to users around the world. But by scanning your own network for anonymous FTP sites, monitoring FTP activity, and securing FTP server configuration, risk of FTP abuse can be reduced.

¹² Software and Information Industry Association. "Seven warning signs of piracy: What to watch for and what's at stake." URL: http://www.siaa.net/piracy/policy/int_7.asp (11 December 2000).

¹³ Software and Information Industry Association. "Seven warning signs of piracy: Anonymous FTP abuses." URL: http://www.siaa.net/piracy/policy/int_7_abuses.asp (11 December 2000).

¹⁴ Aase, Jarle. "Security alert - WAR FTP daemon all versions." 4 February 2000. URL: <http://war.jgaa.com/alert/> (7 December 2000).

¹⁵ CERT Coordination Center. "Anonymous FTP configuration guidelines." CERT Tech Tips. Copyright 1996, rev. 27 July 2000. URL: http://www.cert.org/tech_tips/anonymous_ftp_config.txt (11 December 2000).



Upcoming SANS Training

[Click Here for a full list of all Upcoming SANS Events by Location](#)

SANS Chicago 2017	Chicago, ILUS	Aug 21, 2017 - Aug 26, 2017	Live Event
SANS Virginia Beach 2017	Virginia Beach, VAUS	Aug 21, 2017 - Sep 01, 2017	Live Event
SANS San Francisco Fall 2017	San Francisco, CAUS	Sep 05, 2017 - Sep 10, 2017	Live Event
SANS Tampa - Clearwater 2017	Clearwater, FLUS	Sep 05, 2017 - Sep 10, 2017	Live Event
SANS Network Security 2017	Las Vegas, NVUS	Sep 10, 2017 - Sep 17, 2017	Live Event
SANS Dublin 2017	Dublin, IE	Sep 11, 2017 - Sep 16, 2017	Live Event
SANS Baltimore Fall 2017	Baltimore, MDUS	Sep 25, 2017 - Sep 30, 2017	Live Event
Data Breach Summit & Training	Chicago, ILUS	Sep 25, 2017 - Oct 02, 2017	Live Event
SANS Copenhagen 2017	Copenhagen, DK	Sep 25, 2017 - Sep 30, 2017	Live Event
SANS London September 2017	London, GB	Sep 25, 2017 - Sep 30, 2017	Live Event
Rocky Mountain Fall 2017	Denver, COUS	Sep 25, 2017 - Sep 30, 2017	Live Event
SANS SEC504 at Cyber Security Week 2017	The Hague, NL	Sep 25, 2017 - Sep 30, 2017	Live Event
SANS DFIR Prague 2017	Prague, CZ	Oct 02, 2017 - Oct 08, 2017	Live Event
SANS Oslo Autumn 2017	Oslo, NO	Oct 02, 2017 - Oct 07, 2017	Live Event
SANS October Singapore 2017	Singapore, SG	Oct 09, 2017 - Oct 28, 2017	Live Event
SANS AUD507 (GSNA) @ Canberra 2017	Canberra, AU	Oct 09, 2017 - Oct 14, 2017	Live Event
SANS Phoenix-Mesa 2017	Mesa, AZUS	Oct 09, 2017 - Oct 14, 2017	Live Event
Secure DevOps Summit & Training	Denver, COUS	Oct 10, 2017 - Oct 17, 2017	Live Event
SANS Tysons Corner Fall 2017	McLean, VAUS	Oct 14, 2017 - Oct 21, 2017	Live Event
SANS Brussels Autumn 2017	Brussels, BE	Oct 16, 2017 - Oct 21, 2017	Live Event
SANS Tokyo Autumn 2017	Tokyo, JP	Oct 16, 2017 - Oct 28, 2017	Live Event
SANS Berlin 2017	Berlin, DE	Oct 23, 2017 - Oct 28, 2017	Live Event
SANS Seattle 2017	Seattle, WAUS	Oct 30, 2017 - Nov 04, 2017	Live Event
SANS San Diego 2017	San Diego, CAUS	Oct 30, 2017 - Nov 04, 2017	Live Event
SANS Gulf Region 2017	Dubai, AE	Nov 04, 2017 - Nov 16, 2017	Live Event
SANS Miami 2017	Miami, FLUS	Nov 06, 2017 - Nov 11, 2017	Live Event
SANS Amsterdam 2017	Amsterdam, NL	Nov 06, 2017 - Nov 11, 2017	Live Event
SANS Milan November 2017	Milan, IT	Nov 06, 2017 - Nov 11, 2017	Live Event
SANS Sydney 2017	Sydney, AU	Nov 13, 2017 - Nov 25, 2017	Live Event
Pen Test Hackfest Summit & Training 2017	Bethesda, MDUS	Nov 13, 2017 - Nov 20, 2017	Live Event
SANS Paris November 2017	Paris, FR	Nov 13, 2017 - Nov 18, 2017	Live Event
SANS Adelaide 2017	OnlineAU	Aug 21, 2017 - Aug 26, 2017	Live Event
SANS OnDemand	Books & MP3s OnlyUS	Anytime	Self Paced