

The Danger of Botnets

A couple of months ago I shared a little information about what bots and botnets are. I promised to explain a bit more about why bots are dangerous. To recap, a bot is a program that runs on your computer and allows someone else to control your computer. This ability presents significant risks to individual users as well as businesses.



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The most noticeable effect of a bot may be a decrease in computer performance. A bot may be sending thousands of spam emails from an infected computer. These messages will not appear in your sent items. Just as you can use Outlook or any other email program you choose to, a bot has its own email program that you can't see. There is no simple way for you to know that email is being sent from your computer. An infected computer can also be used to attack other computers. A slow computer can be frustrating for an individual. For a business, it means reduced productivity.

For both the individual user and a company there are far more serious risks. Any data on an infected computer can be stolen. If there is bank account information, stock account information, personal information such as birthdays, social security numbers, etc., this information can be sent to a remote attacker without the user's knowledge. This type of attack is often used for identity theft, but in a company the information that can be stolen may pertain to customer lists, business plans, confidential employee records on an HR employee's PC, or other proprietary information. In a corporate network, a single bot-infected computer can provide the means to gain control of the entire network. What can your competitors do if they control what email is sent to your customers? What can your competitors learn if they read your email and access all of the documents on your network?

Another threat from bots is that they can download and share any data, but on your computer. Illegal music files, illegal pornography, or other illegal files can be stored on your home computer or on a corporate computer. Currently law enforcement does not have a great track record in distinguishing between user-downloaded porn, and porn downloaded by malicious software. Users who are fired incorrectly can file expensive wrongful dismissal and loss of reputation lawsuits.

Keeping your operating system and other programs patched and at current versions can help prevent bot infections. Using high quality security software is also very helpful.

For more information about bots and computer security in general, please feel free to email me at askeset@eset.com.



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