Executive Summary

Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report

As dynamic as the modern threat landscape is, there are some constants:

Adversaries are committed to continually refining or developing new techniques that can evade detection and hide malicious activity. Meanwhile, the defenders—namely, security teams—must constantly improve their approach to protecting the organization and users from these increasingly sophisticated campaigns.

Caught in the middle are the users. But now, it appears they not only are the targets, but also the complicit enablers of attacks.

The *Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report*, which presents the research, insights, and perspectives provided by Cisco® Security Research and other security experts within Cisco, explores the ongoing race between attackers and defenders, and how users are becoming ever-weaker links in the security chain.

Cybersecurity is a broad and complex topic that has a far-reaching impact on users, companies, governments, and other entities around the world. The *Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report* is divided into four areas of discussion. These sections, and the issues explored within them, may at first glance seem disparate, but closer examination reveals their interconnectedness:

Four discussion areas of the *Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report:*

1. Threat Intelligence
2. Security Capabilities Benchmark Study
3. Geopolitical and Industry Trends
4. Changing the View Toward Cybersecurity—From Users to the Corporate Boardroom

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1. Threat Intelligence

This section provides an overview of the latest threat research from Cisco, including updates on exploit kits, spam, threats and vulnerabilities, and malvertising (malicious advertising) trends. Online criminals' growing reliance on users to help launch their attacks is also examined. To produce their analysis of observed trends in 2014, Cisco Security Research utilized a global set of telemetry data. The threat intelligence provided in the report represents work conducted by top security experts across Cisco.

2. Security Capabilities Benchmark Study

To gauge perceptions of security professionals on the state of security in their organizations, Cisco asked chief information security officers (CISOs) and security operations (SecOps) managers in nine countries and at organizations of different sizes about their security resources and procedures. The study's findings are exclusive to the *Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report*.

3. Geopolitical and Industry Trends

In this section, Cisco security, geopolitical, and policy experts identify current and emerging geopolitical trends that organizations—particularly, multinational companies—should monitor. In focus: how cybercrime is flourishing in areas of weak governance. Also covered are recent developments around the world related to the issues of data sovereignty, data localization, encryption, and data compatibility.

4. Changing the View Toward Cybersecurity—From Users to the Corporate Boardroom

Cisco security experts suggest that it is time for organizations to start viewing their approach to cybersecurity differently if they want to achieve real-world security. Strategies include adopting more sophisticated security controls to help defend against threats before, during, and after an attack; making security a topic at the corporate boardroom level; and implementing the Cisco Security Manifesto, a set of security principles that can help organizations become more dynamic in their approach to security—and more adaptive and innovative than adversaries.

The interconnectedness of the security topics covered in the *Cisco 2015 Annual Security Report* comes down to this: Attackers have become more proficient at taking advantage of gaps in security to hide and conceal their malicious activity. Users—and security teams—are both part of the security problem. While many defenders believe their security processes are optimized—and their security tools are effective—in truth, their security readiness likely needs improvement. What happens in the geopolitical landscape, from legislation to security threats, can have a direct impact on business operations and how an organization addresses security. And taking into consideration all these factors, it has never been more critical for organizations of all sizes to understand that security is a people problem, that compromise is inevitable, and that the time to take a new approach to security is now.

Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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