

Re: MSN Messenger forced upgrade

Source: <http://www.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/NT-Bugtraq/2003-12/0016.html>

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To: NTBUGTRAQ@LISTSERV.NTBUGTRAQ.COM

Jason Clishe <jclishe@NUSOFTSOLUTIONS.COM> wrote:

- > *Apparently Microsoft is forcing its MSN Messenger 6.1.01xx users to*
- > *upgrade to MSN Messenger 6.1.0203. The nature of this forced upgrade*
- > *smells suspiciously like some sort of security vulnerability that they*
- > *don't want to announce. ...*

Perhaps an updated version of the exploit this post to Bugtraq

<http://www.securityfocus.com/archive/1/345223>

claimed was, in late November, being "actively [sic] exploited in the wild"?

- > *... Most troubling is the nature in which Microsoft*
- > *handled this upgrade.*

Surprisingly to some, I will not comment on this...

- > *[1] Apparently this upgrade must fix something relatively severe, if*
- > *Microsoft is taking steps to actively prevent version 6.1.01xx from*
- > *begin logged into the Messenger network.*

I imagine that normally an upgrade would only be "necessary" if they altered something (crucial) in the protocol. Has this happened? Has Cerulean released an update of Trillian? Is there a new GAIM to deal with this? (Seems not...)

Perhaps MS is now (trying to be seen to be) acting pre-emptively? Rather than just announce "There is a critical security vulnerability in MSN Messenger v6.1.01xx that is fixed in the 6.1.0203 build — please upgrade" and then, weeks or months later millions of MSN users who did not upgrade become infected with some new worm, MS has decided to force the update (as much as it can) to avoid the potential future bad press?

Of course, MS is in a "damned if it does, damned if it doesn't" (there

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go dozens upon dozens of brain-dead content filters...) situation in such cases. If it doesn't do anything apart from release a patch, it is criticized in the future when a worm hits, and if it does force the patch now it is criticized for driving us further into the Orwellian nightmare...

Personally, if there is a remotely exploitable arbitrary code execution bug in MSN Messenger, I'd prefer that all those millions of "I haven't got a clue about security" home and small business users get their versions forcibly patched. And, I prefer that even if it is a buggy, unstable release because removing such a vulnerability (especially if it seems some folk are actively looking for such holes in the product) improves the ecosystem as a whole. I'm sorry if that upsets someone's use of their computer, but there are alternative chat clients, protocols, and providers so if you (the generic end user "you", not the OP "you") really don't like MS forcing you to upgrade for the good of the net, go find other client software or another service where such forcible updates don't (currently) happen (and just hope your new provider has much more reliable software as I suspect that in the not too distant future forcible updates for all manner of such software will become more or less legally mandatory — the (somewhat misguided IMNSHO) "we can fix the Internet with legislation" rot has, I feel, reached a point from which it may not be able to be turned back, but this is a whole other discussion we should have elsewhere...).

Regards,

Nick FitzGerald

Marcus Ranum's new book "The Myth of Homeland Security" is now out and is available from <http://www.amazon.com/ranum> In this hard-hitting review of the homeland security business, Ranum shows us how the problem is vastly harder than it's being made to sound, and how special interests, butt covering, and bureaucracy are threatening to derail any chance of making progress.
