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This Week's Stories

WannaCry Ransomware: Everything You Need To Know

May 18, 2017

One Of The Largest Cyberattacks Ever Is Currently Eating The Web, Hitting PCs In Countries And Businesses Around The World.

A vulnerability first uncovered by the National Security Agency and then released by hackers on the internet is now being used in one of the most prolific cyberattacks ever around the globe.

It's called WannaCry, and it's brought computer systems from Russia to China to the UK and the US to their knees, locking people out of their data and demanding they pay a ransom or lose everything. So far, more than 200,000 computers in 150 countries have been affected, with victims including hospitals, banks, telecommunications companies and warehouses.

Here's everything you could want to know about WannaCry.

What Is WannaCry?

It's the name for a prolific hacking attack known as "ransomware," that holds your computer hostage until you pay a ransom.

The way it works is that once it infects a computer, it encrypts -- or basically scrambles -- all the data. Then the program puts up a screen demanding you pay money to get access back. Typically the price increases over time until the end of a countdown, when the files are destroyed.

We first heard about WannaCry last week from the UK's health service, which appeared to be one of the first major computer systems affected by the hack. It's also called WannaCrypt.

You can follow who's affected by watching this live tracking map created by MalwareTech.

Why Do Hackers Do This?

The same reason you get telemarketing calls and junk email: It's effective.

Security company Symantec says that ransomware attacks alone jumped by more than one-third to over 483,800 incidents in 2016. And that's just the ones they tracked.

How Do I Protect My Machine?

If you're running a Windows-powered PC, make sure all your software is up to date. In addition, as always, do not open suspicious emails, click on links you don't know or open any files you weren't expecting.



What Do I Do If My Computer Is Infected?

So far, there doesn't appear to be a way to fix WannaCry.

Shortly after WannaCry began to spread, a security researcher accidentally found a kill switch that appeared to stop WannaCry in its tracks. But hackers have since made a fix, and this time there doesn't appear to be any way to stop it. It also has a new name Uiwix, according to researchers at Heimdal Security.

Another diabolical twist is if the ransom isn't paid in 72 hours, the price could double. And after a few days, the files are permanently locked.

Great, So I Have To Pay These Monsters To Get My Computer Back?

While there is no clear fix for WannaCry, experts highly recommend you not pay to get your data back.

While it may be tempting to fork over the \$300 ransom to make the problem go away the FBI, Department of Justice and many tech firms suggest you don't. One reason is that you're basically giving money to criminals, who may choose not to demand even more from you or potentially re-target you in the future since you've indicated you're willing to pay them in the first place.

What Is This Bitcoin Stuff The Hackers Want Us To Pay With?

Hackers typically demand payment via bitcoin, an untraceable digital currency often used on shadowy parts of the internet. While it's hard to trace, the amount of money that's been sent to the criminals is public information.

Ok, So If I Don't Pay, What Can I Do If I'm Infected?

Many experts say wiping your machine and restoring from backups is a better way to go. If you don't have regular backups of your data, I'm sorry to say you're in a real bind.

Who Created WannaCry?

The hack appears to have originally been discovered by the NSA, which allegedly kept it on file as a potential tool to use for surveillance or other issues.

We found out about it because a group of hackers, known as Shadow Brokers, in April released a cache of stolen NSA documents on the internet, including details about the WannaCry vulnerability.

Does WannaCry Affect My Mac, iPhone Or Android?

No. It appears to only affect computers powered by Microsoft Windows. Microsoft released a software update in March that protects against this vulnerability, but we've since learned that many people didn't update their computers.

Microsoft took the unusual step on Friday to release another update for older computers running Windows XP (first released in 2001), Vista (2006) and Windows 7 (2009) and Windows 8 (2012), protecting them as well.

Microsoft, by the way, isn't happy about this attack, and has slammed spy agencies for stockpiling vulnerabilities instead of reporting them to computer companies to be fixed.

Who's Most Vulnerable?

Windows-powered PCs that aren't running updated software that protect from this vulnerability are the most at risk. WannaCry appears to travel across corporate networks, spreading quickly through file-sharing systems.

The diabolical part of that is corporate computers are typically controlled by IT departments that choose when to send updates to computers. So if one computer is vulnerable, it's likely all the computers on a corporate network are too, making it easy for WannaCry to have a large impact.

How Does WannaCry Spread?

It appears networks of computers, like schools, companies, hospitals and businesses, are particularly vulnerable. That's because security researchers say the ransomware is spread through standard file sharing technology used by PCs called Microsoft Windows Server Message Block, or "SMB" for short.

It also appears able to spread to other computers outside corporate networks. Researchers have already found variants of the attack, so there isn't just one way it works.

What Do I Do If I'm Not Hit But Worried I Might Be?

If you have backups, now would be a good time to update them. If you don't, I suggest you start.

Also make sure to check your software updates and talk to your IT managers.

cnet.com

Amazon Echo Is Poised To Change Business Like The iPhone

May 15, 2017

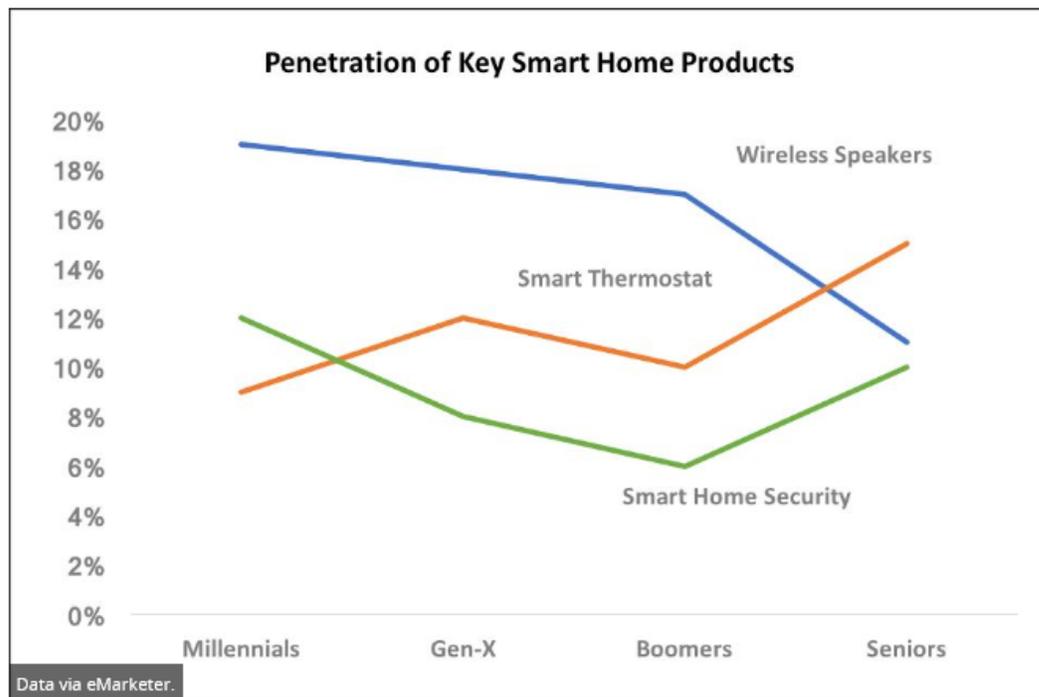
Last week Amazon announced Echo Show, a major upgrade of its Echo "smart speaker" product line, which utilizes Amazon's "Alexa" voice-driven digital assistant. Amazon already dominates the smart speaker category with 70% market share. Echo Show adds a camera and screen, raising the bar by bringing the voice-driven interface to video applications. Amazon's announcement speaks of hands-free video calls, viewing shopping lists and lyrics from your music, monitoring security cameras, and many other things.

We could be on the cusp of another "iPhone moment". The launch of the iPhone ten years ago began a fundamental transformation of the mobile device market from unwired phones to a new computing and communications platform which has now become dominant, especially with younger people. That in turn changed much of the business world and created a new set of tech giants. Something like that looks to be happening again now. Bill Gross, founder of IdeaLab, the original venture incubator, argues that Echo sales are on pace with 1st year iPhone sales, even though an Echo serves a household, while an iPhone serves an individual.

Voice-driven computing crossed a threshold a couple of years ago and became truly useful for non-specialized applications like smart speakers. I've been a Google Voice user for 5+ years. Google Voice will transcribe your voice mails and send them to you as emails, among other things. Five years ago, the transcription results were useful: you could generally tell who was calling and what about. But they were full of errors, some of them rather funny. Now Google Voice's transcriptions are very

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"The Echo enables Amazon to capture the household shopping list and have first shot at fulfilling it. We're just at the beginning of discovering what can be done on this platform, where the smart phone was in 2008 or so."

understandable and often flawless. Voice to text conversion is the key technology that enables smart speakers to input voice instructions into a computer driven system that provides a service, like Echo. It is now ready for prime time.



Smart home technology appeals to all generations. [+]

Voice-driven computing is likely to greatly broaden the market for digital cloud-based services, which includes most of what Amazon, Google, Facebook, Snap, etc. do. Almost everyone in the first world has a capable smart phone now, but the big innovations in the mobile ecosystem occur most often among Millennials. They are not only digital natives but also mobile natives (at least the younger ones). A lot of that generation's culture developed in the smart phone medium, and they are generally better at typing information into the phone than we older folks. However, the smart home, of which the Echo is the hub, appeals to people of all generations (see chart above). And, voice-driven devices liberate users from the on-screen keyboard. In my circle of friends, it's not just the young geeks who proudly report buying an Echo and are eager to show it off; it's a broad cross section.

Voice-driven computing is a powerful enabler of the Internet of Things (IoT). The technology pieces of IoT have been available for a decade or more. It has been waiting for a "killer app" to bring the market to critical mass, what spreadsheets did for PCs.

Until recently, only a limited set of IoT use cases have been in any real demand. Now we see the general home-control application taking off with the rise of Echo/Alexa and similar. If this creates a critical mass of installed hardware and engaged users, then many additional IoT applications can emerge much more quickly.

Probably the biggest impact of voice-driven computing lies beyond IoT. Amazon makes it easy for Echo users to order products in the moment when they recognize a need: "Alexa, we need more diapers. Please repeat our last order. Make it next-day delivery."

The Echo enables Amazon to capture the household shopping list and have first shot at fulfilling it. We're just at the beginning of discovering what can be done on this platform, where the smart phone was in 2008 or so.

So, for almost any entrepreneur or business owner, it's important to consider what it means if voice-driven computing becomes the next big computing/communications platform – if we are at another “iPhone moment”. Here are some useful questions to explore:

- How will e-commerce (or all commerce) be affected by the voice-driven platform? Mobile profoundly changed commerce, giving rise to Uber, for example. Amazon's “shop in the moment” strategy is one example of a new kind of e-commerce created by voice-driven computing. What else?
- How will communication be affected? Mobile gave rise to new communication modes based on photos, like Instagram and Snap. The screen and camera built into the Echo Show indicate that Amazon will target communication applications: it talks about making hands-free video calls and voice calls from any room in the house using Echo Dot extensions.
- How will search and advertising change? Voice-driven search is already a key component of smart speakers. Advertising is profoundly different on mobile devices where data display is based on a feed or card paradigm rather than a web page, which has room for ads around the edges. Mobile media platforms like Facebook had to work out how to insert ads into the feed. Will my smart speaker start to broadcast audio ads, like some web pages? I'd be tempted to fix that with a hammer, unless of course I'm addicted to the value I'm otherwise getting from the platform.
- Entertainment? Already Alexa plays music. With internet-connected displays, the same could be done for video. The Echo becomes the distribution channel for media, with Amazon giving its products prime placement and gathering the usage data. Netflix, take note.

This is a very early and incomplete set of questions. As voice-driven computing continues to grow, entrepreneurs need to keep a sharp eye out for the ways in which it will change their businesses, the threats it poses and, more important, and opportunities it creates. This could be another big bang in the information world, one from which we are already hearing the echoes.

[forbes.com](#)

Products & Services

Uber Is Now In The Trucking Business: ‘Press A Button, Get A Load’

May 18, 2017

The embattled ride-hailing company announced Thursday that it was launching Uber Freight, an app that connects professional truck drivers with shippers looking to transport big loads over long distances.

"We've been in stealth since late last year, moving loads in Texas and a few other places," says Eric Berdinis, senior product manager for Uber Freight. "Uber pioneered the notion of 'press a button, get a car,' and now we want to create 'press a button, get a load.'"

This trucking middleman role, which has largely involved a cumbersome scheduling process anchored to phone calls, is being targeted for a technological overhaul by other companies that promise to bring efficiency and reliability to the matchmaking task.

But where startups such as Ghosttruck target consumers, Uber Freight is appealing to the nation's massive professional trucking industry, whose 3.5 million truck drivers move 10.5 billions of tons of freight annually, according to American Trucking Associations.

That's a space that Amazon also is rumored to be getting into as a way to help reduce its own massive shipping costs. Other startups looking to supplant the old-school dispatcher include Convoy, Cargomatic and Trucker Path.

"We take the guesswork out of finding and booking freight, which is often the most stressful part of a driver's day," Uber said in a Medium blogpost.

Uber Freight represents another offshoot of the company's business plan, which also includes food delivery service UberEats and Uber for Business. A recent Uber Elevate conference in Dallas focused on the company's vision for a fleet of flying cars.

The new venture also demonstrates how the world's most valuable if controversial startup continues to push ahead into new business territories despite its present internal and legal woes.

Uber Freight launches as the company and its CEO Travis Kalanick get set to release the results of an internal investigation launched on the heels of a former employee's description of a sexist and aggressive workplace environment. Kalanick is also on the hunt for a chief operating officer to help him run Uber, which has been valued at upwards of \$70 billions.

Also on Kalanick's plate are a lawsuit over self-driving car trade secrets from Google's self-driving car company, Waymo. That suit is expected to go to trial in the fall, and the judge in the case recently recommended that federal officials look into whether criminal charges should be filed.

The suit stems from Uber's purchase last summer of self-driving truck company Otto. That company's co-founder, Anthony Levandowski, used to work on Google's car project. Google claims Levandowski stole proprietary data related to its sensor technology. Uber claims that its sensors do not involve any purloined tech.

It remains to be seen if the nation's truckers will take to an app-based way of conducting business. But Uber is banking on the simplified process winning over users.

"What used to take several hours and multiple phone calls can now be achieved with the touch of a button. Vetted users download the app, search for a load, and simply tap to book it. We send a rate confirmation within seconds, eliminating a common anxiety in trucking about whether or not the load is really confirmed."

Those perks ultimately may come to what Uber hopes will really be the big draw: quicker payments.

Where truckers often can wait weeks for payment, Uber is "committed to paying within a few days, fee-free, for every single load. When things don't go as planned or drivers have to wait longer than expected, we pay for that too."

usatoday.com

Amazon's Media Streamer, Fire TV, Debuts In A TV

May 16, 2017

Amazon's media streaming device, the Fire TV, is making its debut in a line of smart televisions that go on sale Tuesday.

The new line of televisions, originally announced in January, are manufactured by Element Electronics. These televisions include Amazon's Fire TV device within the TV, letting users stream TV shows, music, and movies directly from the TVs.

"The TVs will be available for pre-order today on Amazon and will ship and be in stores in June."

The Fire TV, which debuted in 2014, is among a growing number Amazon hardware devices, some of which are gaining traction, including Amazon's home automation device Echo.

Some manufacturers have started building media streaming services directly into their Internet-connected TVs so people don't need two separate devices to stream media from Amazon's video service, Netflix, or Hulu. For example, some Samsung TVs have Fire TV rival Google Chromecast built in.

Called the Amazon ("AMZN") Fire TV Edition, the TVs have 4K HD and come in four screen sizes starting at \$449 for a 43-inch screen and as much as \$899 for a 65-inch screen. The TVs will be available for pre-order today on Amazon and will ship and be in stores in June.

Users of the new TV need only one remote to operate streaming services from Amazon Video, Netflix, HBO Now, and others. Element and Amazon said Tuesday that the TV gives access to over 300,000 TV episodes and movies from Netflix, Amazon Video, HBO NOW, Showtime, Hulu, and Sling TV. The remote also includes Amazon's voice assistant Alexa so users can use their voices to search for movies, launch apps, and control other smart home devices like connected light bulbs.

Element, which is licensing Amazon's technology, declined to give specifics about its financial arrangement with Amazon.

fortune.com

Instagram Launches Selfie Filters, Copying The Last Big Snapchat Feature

May 16, 2017

Today Instagram Stories adds a more subtle and mature but error-prone copycat of Snapchat's beloved augmented reality selfie filters. The eight initial "face filters," as Instagram calls them, work exactly like Snapchat, and let you add virtual koala ears, nerd glasses, a butterfly crown or wrinkle-smooth makeup to yourself and friends in photos or videos.

TechCrunch got an exclusive hands-on demo of the filters, which are easier to use and don't distort your face as much, but don't track your movements and stay properly positioned on you face as well as Snapchat's. You can watch our hands-on demo video below, and follow along and watch our interview with Instagram's VP of Product Kevin Weil today at TechCrunch Disrupt in our post: Instagram on copying Snapchat "This is the way the tech industry works"

The face filters are the last major Snapchat Stories feature missing from Instagram after it cloned Snap's slideshow-sharing format, overlaid creative tools, disappearing direct messages and more. Without a compelling reason for new users to pick the original Snapchat Stories over the Instagram Stories clone, Instagram could thereby widen the gap by adding to its 200 million daily Stories users that already outnumber Snapchat's 166 million total users, and further slowdown Snap's growth rate that led it to lose 25 percent of its share price value after it announced weak earnings last week.

Face filters and three more features roll out to all users today via an iOS and Android app update. An eraser tool will let you remove drawings you added to an image, though it can't "Photoshop" out objects from the original image like Snapchat's Magic Eraser. Instagram's new Rewind mode plays videos in reverse, just like one of Snapchat's oldest filters.

The most original new Instagram feature is the ability to type a hashtag and add it to your Stories posts as a sticker, just like a location sticker. When viewers tap on these stickers, they'll be taken to the Instagram hashtag page showing other public, permanent posts with that hashtag. Eventually,

"The face filters are the last major Snapchat Stories feature missing from Instagram after it cloned Snap's slideshow-sharing format, overlaid creative tools, disappearing direct messages and more."

though, you could imagine the ability to search Stories by hashtag, or watch a “Hashtag Story” compiled from all the publicly visible Stories with that label. Instagram actually just started testing Location Stories.

Face Filters For Adults Too

“There’s a lot of exciting work being done around augmented reality,” an Instagram spokesperson said when asked about the app copying Snapchat’s face filters.

“We’ve heard from our community that they want more creative ways to share everyday moments and engage with friends. With face filters, they have more tools than ever at their fingertips, and all in one place.”

While that dodges the question a bit, the last part is revealing. Instagram wants to be the one-stop shop for visual communication, no matter your age. Instagram’s spin on Snapchat’s selfie masks is designed to make them simple and less wacky so they appeal to users beyond teens.

If you’re not into Stories, you can also use Face Filters with Instagram Direct and Boomerang, as well as images you might want to post to the main feed.

Instead of needing to know you tap on the screen to activate face filters like in Snapchat, Instagram steals that access point so it’s intuitive for veteran mask users, but also adds a Smiley button to reveal the tray of 8 filters along the bottom of the screen.

“The designs and specific filters were built by the Instagram team,” says the Instagram spokesperson. But referring to the AR startup Facebook acquired last year, they noted that “The underlying technology uses MSQRD’s imaging technology and proprietary technology from Facebook’s applied machine learning teams.”

Instagram wouldn’t share whether the available filters will expand, rotate or come and go, but they did say “we’ll be bringing more face filters to the community on a regular basis.” Here’s a brief overview of the initial set:

- Gold Crown – A Caesar-style golden wreath around your head, this filter is subtle and universal enough to be a good introduction to filters.
- Koala – This cute filter adds a Koala nose and ears that raise in surprise when you open your mouth, though it falls short of being as adorable as Snapchat’s iconic puppy filter.
- Nerd Glasses – This one swirls math equations around your head, can appear on two people at once and features glasses that slip down your nose if you tilt forward.
- Bunny – Another attempt at beating Snapchat’s puppy filter, these ears raise in surprise when you open your mouth, and react to gravity by folding over if you lean side to side.
- Butterfly Crown – Instagram’s attempt at Snapchat’s Coachella-favorite flower crown puts a wreath of butterflies on your head that flutter off as you move.
- Ice Crown – You exhale steam as snowflakes flurry around with this ice crown.
- Peacock – Giant purple feathers in the foreground shield you from view until they’re pulled aside to reveal you, when you lean forward, looking like a 1930s flapper.
- Makeup – Instagram’s final face filter washes a golden hue over you, smoothing your wrinkles so you look more “beautiful.”

Overall, the filters are meant to subtly augment your face rather than completely cover it or change its shape like some of Snapchat's more aggressive filters do. While that makes them less playful and noticeable, they're also more artful and mature — something that adults might actually use.

For now Instagram won't allow Sponsored Face Filters, but those could come eventually to rival Snapchat's similar ad unit. With all the most popular Snapchat Stories features successfully cloned, the smaller things left include adding 3D augmented reality objects to the world around you. Now things should get more interesting as Instagram will have to do more innovating as its run out of stuff to copy.

techcrunch.com

Emerging Technology

Google To Push AI Smarts To iPhone, New Photo Books Service

May 16, 2017

Google's artificial intelligence software is already inside Android phones, smart speakers and watches. At the Google I/O conference this week, the Alphabet Inc. unit plans to bring it to at least three more places: iPhones, coffee tables and kitchens. The Mountain View, California-based company is set to announce a version of its AI-powered assistant for Apple Inc.'s iPhone as soon as Wednesday, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Google's voice-based Assistant, unveiled at last year's I/O and released in the fall, competes with Apple's Siri and Amazon.com Inc.'s Alexa. It is set to land on the iPhone as a free, standalone app that can be downloaded from Apple's App Store, according to the person. It would arrive first in the U.S., but Google is working on adding support for other countries in the future.

Like the Assistant on Google's own Pixel smartphones, the iPhone version will take commands via voice, the person said. The difference is that it won't come pre-installed on the iPhone, a potential barrier to wide adoption. Still, the Assistant app will integrate with other Google apps on the iPhone so a user could ask to see a video and it will begin playing via YouTube.

Google's AI will show up in other new products this week. The company's popular Photos app will be upgraded with a feature for creating physical coffee table photo books, according to the person familiar. Last year, Google upgraded the AI software supporting Photos so the service could automatically create albums by combining relevant and related images.

Users will be able to order physical, printed books of pictures from the Photos app to be shipped to their homes, the person said. Google plans to offer multiple types of book materials for the service, with one option costing \$10 per book, the person added. Apple, in the past, offered a similar service for its iPhoto application on Mac computers, but the company discontinued the feature about a year ago. It's available on the company's newer Photos app.

Google is another big rival for Shutterfly Inc., which offers a digital photo storage service, photo books and calendars. When Amazon launched a competing offering last year, Shutterfly shares slumped more than 10 percent in a day. On Tuesday, Shutterfly stock dropped as much as 4.8 percent to \$49.33, the most in more than three months.

Google is also integrating its Assistant into GE home appliances such as refrigerators, dishwashers, ovens, washers and dryers. Users will be able to ask the Assistant how many cleaning pods are left in the dishwasher, or tell it to pre-heat the oven to 350F, or ask if the laundry is clean. News website Android Police earlier reported that Google's Assistant will be coming to the iPhone. A Google spokeswoman declined to comment.

bloomberg.com

Sprint Debuts Open Source NFV/SDN Platform Developed With Intel Labs

May 16, 2017

“Moving forward, Marquardt revealed Sprint is working to “harden” the C3PO code and extend it to suit a variety of use cases, including the Internet of Things.”

AT&T has been the headliner in the carrier race to software defined networking (SDN) and network function virtualization (NFV). But Sprint is putting its own stamp on the space this week with its debut of a new open source SDN/NFV mobile core solution.

Developed in collaboration with Intel Labs over the last four years, Sprint said its solution – dubbed C3PO – is designed to streamline mobile core architecture by collapsing multiple components into as few network nodes as possible. The carrier reported it was able to achieve 1.63 Mpps (million packets per second) throughput in lab tests conducted on Dell EMC DSS 9000 rack scale infrastructure with compute sleds running dual socket 14 core Intel Xeon processors E5-2680 v4.

Sprint indicated the configuration utilized just seven processor cores – one packet processing core and six processor cores supporting other tasks such as control plane, statistics, load balancer, operating system, and other operations, for 500,000 subscribers using a typical Sprint traffic model. A similar C3PO configuration yielded 2.2 Mpps with a similar traffic model for 50,000 subscribers, the carrier noted.

The system is designed to be used by global operators and other third parties as a reference for commercial applications, Sprint said.

“C3PO makes traditional mobility architectures and software designs more streamlined, efficient, and scalable,” Sprint VP of Technology Ron Marquardt commented. “By combining Sprint’s real-world operator knowledge with Intel’s research on optimizing software for standard high-volume servers, we’ve developed a single solution that provides seven functions previously located within separate physical elements.”

Marquardt indicated Sprint’s role in the collaboration with Intel Labs was to write the SDN piece of C3PO for a more efficient control plane implementation, which the carrier has now contributed to OpenDaylight. Intel Labs was tasked with developing the Evolved Packet Core control and user plane, and has reportedly contributed its code for the same to the CORD project.

Sprint’s decision to release its code on an open source platform is part of the carrier’s commitment to advancing the industry, Marquardt said.

“Open Source is a model that works,” Marquardt wrote in a Monday blog post. “Open source development allows for very rapid innovation, with a vibrant community providing a high volume of contributions at a relentless pace. The open source model streamlines processes and removes confusion on specifications and their interpretation because the actual implementation is what matters, not the verbiage of a written document ... The lines between open source prototypes and normative standards are blurring, and Sprint will continue to contribute to these advancements in our industry.”

Moving forward, Marquardt revealed Sprint is working to “harden” the C3PO code and extend it to suit a variety of use cases, including the Internet of Things.

wirelessweek.com

Mergers and Acquisitions

Comcast And Philips Lighting Partner To Offer Xfinity Home Customers Simpler Home Security And Automation Experience

May 17, 2017

“Customers can now easily manage and control their Philips Hue connected lighting system through the Xfinity Home mobile app.”

Comcast today announced a partnership with Philips Lighting (Euronext Amsterdam ticker: LIGHT), a global leader in lighting, to brighten Xfinity Home customers’ smart homes and deliver a seamless home security and automation experience.

Customers can now easily manage and control their Philips Hue connected lighting system through the Xfinity Home mobile app. They can also create “rules,” or automated commands, that synchronize their lights with home security and other smart home functions for increased peace of mind. For instance, customers can automatically turn their lights on or off when they arm their security system when they leave for work, or automatically turn their lights on when dark, so their home appears occupied.

“Our partnership with Philips Lighting advances our commitment to bring our customers best-in-class devices they can trust and easily manage on one, integrated platform – the Xfinity Home platform,” said Daniel Herscovici, senior vice president and general manager of Xfinity Home.

“With the Philips Hue family of products, our customers can customize their lighting according to their own needs and daily routines. They can also set up simple automated commands, such as turning on the hallway lights when they enter the home and disarm the system.”

“We are pleased to integrate the Philips Hue connected lighting system with Xfinity Home, and continue to expand our Friends of Hue, to deliver a personalized home security and automation experience,” said Mark Cieri, vice president and general manager, Philips Lighting US.

“It’s all about improving our customers’ lives and making them feel more comfortable within their homes.”

X1 customers with Xfinity Home service can also use their X1 voice remote to call up many home security and smart home commands. Customers can say “Xfinity Home Cameras,” to see their camera feeds, or “Xfinity Home Arm” and “Xfinity Home Disarm” to arm and disarm their security systems.

In the near future, even more features and capabilities will be added to X1, so Xfinity Home customers can use their voice to control their Philips Hue connected lighting system.

Comcast continuously expands its Xfinity Home partner program by integrating best-in-class third-party devices, like the Philips Hue connected lighting system, to give customers a single experience that connects and manages their home security and automation needs.

Philips Hue is interoperable with more than 600 apps, products and platforms from other brands and developers to transform how customers experience and interact with light in their home.

finance.yahoo.com

Uber Once Offered To Partner With Tesla On Self-Driving Cars – But Elon Musk Said No

May 16, 2017

Tesla brushed off an offer last year by Uber to partner on self-driving cars.

The revelation comes from Wild Ride, a book written by Fortune's Adam Lashinsky, which Bloomberg read in advance of its publication next week.

Uber CEO Travis Kalanick pitched the partnership idea to Tesla boss Elon Musk, who said the idea was "too far out" and that Uber should continue focusing on its core ride-hailing platform, according to Bloomberg.

A few days after turning Kalanick down in the summer of 2016, Musk said he planned to enter the ride-hailing business, effectively competing with Uber.

Uber declined to comment on the matter. Tesla did not immediately return Business Insider's requests for comment.

"When true self-driving is approved by regulators, it will mean that you will be able to summon your Tesla from pretty much anywhere," Musk wrote in his "Master Plan, Part Deux" last year. "You will also be able to add your car to the Tesla shared fleet just by tapping a button on the Tesla phone app and have it generate income for you while you're at work or on vacation, significantly offsetting and at times potentially exceeding the monthly loan or lease cost."

Tesla plans to operate its own fleet in cities where demand exceeds supply, Musk wrote in the plan. The electric carmaker plans to release more details about its ride-hailing service, Tesla Network, at some point this year.

Tesla cars are currently being built with the hardware to eventually support fully autonomous driving.

Musk's declared entrance into the ride-hailing space marked a stark departure from his previous stance on car-sharing. In 2014, Musk said there's "a limit to the whole sharing thing."

Whether or not Kalanick's proposal played a role in inspiring Musk to seriously pursue car-sharing is unclear. But Kalanick said in Wild Ride he knew Musk was planning to compete when he turned down the offer.

businessinsider.com

Industry Reports

BlackBerry Is Back! Stock Soars After WannaCry Attack

May 18, 2017

Remember BlackBerry? The stock is enjoying a renaissance lately, surging nearly 10% in the past week and almost 50% this year. But this isn't Barack Obama's or Kim Kardashian West's BlackBerry.

The former mobile king, whose addictive QWERTY keyboard phones were once so popular with politicians, celebrities and traders that they were known as CrackBerries, now outsources the manufacturing of its namesake phones.

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"So BlackBerry, under CEO John Chen, has made a successful transition to software and connected devices, aka the Internet of Things."

BlackBerry realized it wasn't going to win the device battle against Apple and the army of companies making phones that run on Google/Alphabet's (GOOGL, Tech30) Android.

So BlackBerry, under CEO John Chen, has made a successful transition to software and connected devices, aka the Internet of Things. Software and services now account for about 60% of BlackBerry's overall sales.

The company has made particularly big inroads in telematics, running software for cars. Ford, GM, Fiat Chrysler, Honda and Toyota are all customers.

This focus may be the main reason why BlackBerry's stock has rallied so sharply this week. Shares rose above \$10 for the first time in two years.

Cybersecurity is also a key business line for BlackBerry. It always has been.

A top-notch reputation for security is a main reason why governments and Wall Street firms stuck with BlackBerry even as consumers were flocking to touchscreen smartphones.

And security is once again a hot trend for investors following the WannaCry ransomware attacks that began last week. Shares of several cybersecurity stocks and ETFs that own them have surged since WannaCry started to infect PCs and other devices.

BlackBerry gets a piece of the cybersecurity pie (sorry) too. It reminded its customers (and perhaps investors as well) of its ability to help minimize the damage from attacks like WannaCry.

The company posted on its Inside BlackBerry corporate blog this week that it has tools to help businesses spot missing patches that can let viruses and other malware through. And it warned that more attacks like WannaCry are likely to come.

"The reality is that WannaCry is just the tip of the iceberg. Cyberattacks continue to increase exponentially in size and frequency, causing billions of dollars in damage to our governments, businesses and society," BlackBerry wrote.

"As we move towards the Internet of Things, these types of attacks will only get worse, threatening not just our privacy and security but also our personal safety," the company added.

Sounds scary. But it's good for BlackBerry's business. Chen told investors in March that BlackBerry should actually be back in black this year. It expects to report an annual profit after a series of losses.

BlackBerry is no longer burning cash and in danger of going under either. It wasn't that long ago, that investors were worried BlackBerry would run out of money. Some speculated it would have to sell to a larger tech firm in order to survive.

But BlackBerry finished last quarter with \$1.7 billion on its books, up nearly \$90 million from the end of November.

So don't be surprised to see BlackBerry's stock continue to ripen (sorry again) the next time there is another big cyberattack. The company is in a good position to capitalize on the growing threat of ransomware and other malicious bugs.

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Qualcomm Sues iPhone Manufacturers As Apple Battle Escalates

May 17, 2017

Apple told its manufacturers to stop paying for Qualcomm's technology. The chipmaker wants its money.

These chips ain't cheap.

Qualcomm filed a lawsuit Wednesday against Apple's iPhone manufacturers that alleges breach of contract. The suit, filed in US District Court in California, comes less than a month after Apple stopped paying patent royalties to the chip company.

Apple's manufacturers, such as Foxconn, used to pay Qualcomm for the intellectual property rights to make chips that connect phones online. The legal battle between Apple and Qualcomm has been heating up as the two companies brawl over who has licensing rights to the processor technology.

"Our license agreements with Apple's manufacturers remain valid and enforceable," Don Rosenberg, Qualcomm's general counsel said in a statement. "The manufacturers must continue to live up to their obligations under these agreements and Apple should immediately cease its tortious interference."

Qualcomm argues that the manufacturers acknowledge they have a contractual obligation to pay royalties to chipmakers but that they need to follow Apple's orders against paying. The two companies have sued and countersued each other since January.

Apple said that Qualcomm has "refused to negotiate fair terms" and decided to stop paying until a judge can determine how much it should cough up in royalties.

"Qualcomm's demands are unreasonable and they have been charging higher rates based on our innovation, not their own," an Apple spokesman said.

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