

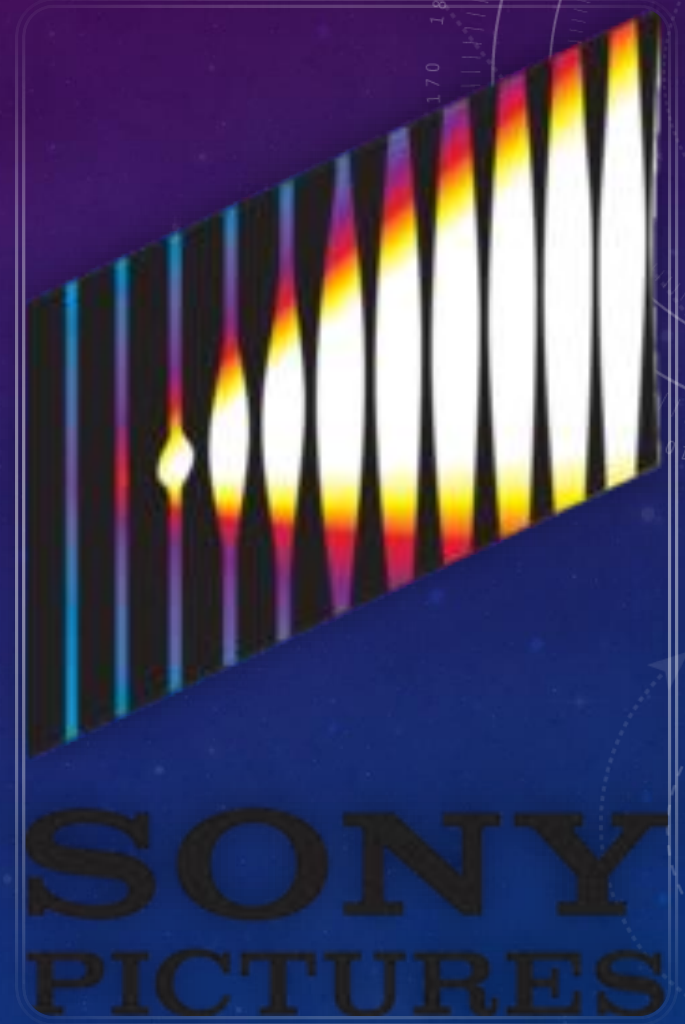


SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT HACK

BY: JOSHUA SMITH

WHO INSTIGATED THE BREACH?

- The Sony Pictures hack was instigated by a group calling themselves the “The Guardians of Peace”.
- The aim of the attack was to shutdown the private computer network within Sony, expose private emails between staff, and jeopardize the security of free creative thought.
- Sony Pictures had never experienced a cyber attack of this scale prior to the event, and as such their security was much relaxed.



HACKER'S MESSAGE

- Over on the right is what employees came into work to.
- Underneath the main message are links to several terabytes worth of compromised information.
- A lot of these links were sent to media outlets and are what spurred the coverage of the event in the first place.





TRUE NATURE OF THE “GOP”

- Based on an FBI investigation, “the North Korean government is responsible for these actions” (FBI, 2014)
- This wasn’t just a small-scale attack made by a small group. It was a massive cyber attack carried out on the American private sector and their employees.



DIFFICULTY IDENTIFYING CYBER ATTACKERS

- Under normal circumstances this data breach would have been very hard to assign to a foreign power.
- The main way the FBI can discern hacker groups is by the patterns of how they compromise systems.
- In the Sony Pictures case, “there were similarities in specific lines of code, encryption algorithms, data deletion methods, and compromised networks” (FBI, 2014).
- The diplomatic ramifications of accusing other foreign powers of cyber attacks is something to also keep in mind. Its not always easy to point fingers until deep analysis of methods that were utilized, and still the culprit can remain ambiguous.

MOTIVATION

- The reason for the directed cyber attack was due to the production of a movie called “The Interview”.
- UMass Boston IT News states that, North Korea had condemned the movie as an “Act of war” (Mazzarella, 2015). Consequently, they began a cyberwar on Sony.
- For a U.S. citizen freedom of speech is a natural right given to all. However, speaking out against the leader in North Korea can justify execution. Something as small as a parody movie of their leader spurred this attack, but the damages were great.



HOW DID THEY BREECH SECURITY?

- HBS Digital Initiative states that, “The GOP initially hacked into one server that was not so well protected and escalated the attack to gain access to the rest of the network” (HBS Digital Initiative, 2016).
- To break this down further, essentially one server was compromised that allowed access to the rest of the network within Sony.
- In addition, several security certificates and passwords were overly simple. A password of “password” was found multiple times throughout security measures and was very simple to bypass.



DATE OF BREACH

- The date of the hack occurred on November 24, 2014.
- At that time, the “Interview” had already completed its production and was ready to be released to the public.
- This is particularly significant when you consider the response that Sony had, and how they handled the aftermath of the hack.
- Lastly, the final detailed FBI investigation update was released on December 19, 2014

HANDLING THE BREACH

- Unfortunately, Sony caved into demands from the GOP
- Only a couple days before the planned release of the movie, distribution was cancelled.
- In addition, Sony pictures demanded that all revealed data be destroyed. However, several media outlets denied the requests and continued to report on the stolen data.
- In short, it was nothing but a complete capitulation to the hackers demands.

REPORTING ON STOLEN DATA?

- There are many moral questions when it comes to how we handle compromised data that the Sony Hack presents.
- The main question being, is it morally justified to keep reporting on compromised information?
- “A 2001 Supreme Court decision said a radio station couldn't be held responsible for broadcasting newsworthy audio recordings even if those recordings were originally made by someone in violation of wiretapping laws” (Peterson, 2019).



OVERALL OUTCOME AND AFTERMATH

- The former co-chair for Sony Pictures was fired based on the controversial emails released (Digital Initiative).
- Trust was lost in the company, and Sony has subsequently received less business overall after the incident.
- It set a precedent of surrendering to hacker demands for the private sector.
- Freedom of Speech in the U.S. was compromised by a foreign power, along with the privacy of the employees.
- Millions of dollars was lost in the production of a movie that was never released
- Overall, it served as a wake-up call to the private sector on the risk of cybersecurity threats.

FUTURE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND TAKEAWAYS

- In the future multi-layered defense needs to be implemented to prevent a total loss of a network.
- The private sector is not immune to cyber attacks by foreign nations and must be ready to defend their data against potential threats.
- A statistic to keep in mind is that, repairing after a security incident is 10 to 100 times higher than preventing it in the first place” (Mazzarella, 2015).
- In short, the cost of proper preventive measures largely outweighs the cost of the breach’s effect on the company.

REFERENCES

- FBI. (2014, December 19). *Update on Sony investigation*. FBI. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/update-on-sony-investigation>.
- HBS Digital Initiative. (2016, November 17). *The sony pictures hack: Two years later*. Technology and Operations Management - MBA Student Perspectives. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-rctom/submission/the-sony-pictures-hack-two-years-later/>.
- Mazarella, J. (2015, January 6). *THE SONY HACK — WHAT HAPPENED, HOW DID IT HAPPEN....WHAT DID WE LEARN?* UMass Boston IT news. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://blogs.umb.edu/itnews/2015/01/06/the-sony-hack/>.
- Peterson, A. (2019, April 24). *The sony pictures hack, explained*. The Washington Post. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/12/18/the-sony-pictures-hack-explained/>.