

Lizard Squad

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November 30, 2018

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GBA-327-CA02

Most cybersecurity attacks are motivated by money, political activism, or infamy. The Lizard Squad is unique because they combined each of these motives in order to plan their attacks. Starting as a small group in 2014, they found each other on a forum called Darkode which is a popular place for most internet hackers. On this forum, the original Lizard Squad members had used chat rooms to communicate their plans (Turton 2015). They also had people who were not officially members of the group, but they still participated in some of the attacks and carried out the squad's nefarious deeds. The Lizard Squad interrupted the lives of publicly-known celebrities, private individuals, and businesses, and they and their actions act as unfortunate examples of the importance of being sufficiently protected from cybercrimes.

Lizard Squad's tactics have impacted a lot of people in many different settings- from airline traveling to at-home gaming. The hacking group was formed in an online forum for hackers called Darkode. Many of the hackers had been long time users of this specific forum and it worked as a center hub for the squad's formation. Lizard Squad is estimated to have about 30 members total, including their affiliates (Turton 2015).

While the Squad is anonymous, handfuls of members have been exposed and charged for their actions. One of the charges includes that of Julius "zeekill" Kivimaki, a then-17-year-old hacker from Finland, who is responsible for diverting planes and hacking Sony Online Entertainment (Tassi 2018). He served "a three-month sentence in a maximum-security prison for the American Airlines tweet and other cybercrimes" (Turton 2015). In addition to his exposure from the airline tweets, he unapologetically spoke out about the Xbox hacking. He said that "[he would] be rather worried if these kids didn't have anything better to do than play games on their consoles on Christmas Day... [he could not] really say [he felt] bad" (THR Staff 2014). Another member, Zachary Buchta, a 20-year-old, pleaded guilty to causing damage to protected

computers, “a charge that can carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison” (Brown 2015).

Suspects accused of hacking in relation to Lizard Squad have been known to range in age from 15 and older. It is a group that does not discriminate in their victims and will utilize members, affiliates, and bystanders to accomplish their mission.

As mentioned earlier, Lizard Squad was willing to and did make public and private persons and companies victims of their misdeeds. For example, their first major attack can be most simply put as their wish to steal Christmas. The primary part of the plan was to take over Xbox and PlayStation networks simultaneously. The reason that the icon representing them is often a lizard dressed in a Santa Claus suit is that they infamously hacked and took away users’ access to PSN and Xbox live during the Christmas season of 2014. That being said, the Lizard Squad mainly affected millennials because the attacks were either on gaming systems or through social media sites; however, some families from all around the world were affected by the squad’s cyber-attacks as well. The Christmas attack had an impact on many younger boys and girls who had received either PlayStation or Xboxes for the holiday and wished to play them. Lizard Squad carefully timed their Christmas Xbox attack to correlate with the nation setting up their new consoles. Many individuals would be plugging in their new Xbox and going online as Lizard Squad was beginning their attack. In order to succeed in their goal, “Lizard Squad had spent months acquiring 150,000 bots and 30 servers to overload Xbox Live and PlayStation Network” (Turton 2015). Much time was spent preparing for a crime that would take place within minutes. In addition to gamers, the Lizard Squad targeted public figures, but this time, instead of working through gaming systems, they used the social media platform of Twitter. When they hacked celebrity twitter accounts, this affected not only the celebrity users but also

the overall Twitter company because it demonstrated the platform's weaknesses and began to concern other Twitter users.

Another one of the issues was the attack with the home routing systems, and they took control of just about 150,000 systems. Not only was the group able to manipulate personal computers and routers, but they claim that they were about to control refrigerators and other smart home devices as well (Fox-Brewster 2016). The specific smart devices other than fridges included thermostats, and television sets also, which ended up affecting many more areas of the household than anticipated. Having affected all these people, in an interview, the members of the squad do not seem to feel guilty about their actions. Buchta went on to plead guilty "to one count of conspiracy to commit damage to protected computers" (Good 2017). Although such a plea would usually result in the charge that would carry a potential 10-year prison sentence, Buchta has made a deal to work with the same group whom he once referred to as losers in his Twitter handle, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. If he works with the FBI, "prosecutors will recommend he do only 2 1/2 years in a federal penitentiary" (Good 2017). Being forced to work with those he once antagonized online in order to help end the criminal careers of those he would have once considered companions will perhaps teach Buchta the error he made in interrupting people's lives for his own gain.

With threats such as Lizard Squad on the rise, security for mobile, wireless, and desktop devices has never been more important. From small business' that contain personal financial material to large companies, such as hospitals and banks, that house even more personal medical records and financial files for larger accounts, no one is completely immune to the possibility of hackers infiltrating these systems and sharing our information. Cyber-security has been advanced in not only encryptions but in man power too. More and more people are beginning to join the

fight to protect this information by creating smarter protection services for common users. With bitcoin users increasing and cryptocurrency being a viable method of commerce, people must use all the help they can get to protect themselves. It is up to the user and the company to install as many firewalls and security features as possible, so cyber-terrorists like Lizard Squad can be brought to justice.

The actions of Lizard Squad go against the ideals of what the Internet is meant to be in the first place. It is not a place to steal or cheat or lie. It is not a fake face to hide behind while obscene acts are committed from afar. The internet is a shared space, for real people, meant to convey freedom of knowledge to all its users. Those who use the web to commit fraud or hateful acts against other people who are simply trying to be connected to something necessary in our world, those criminals, do not understand the value of the information shared. They do not share our core values of integrity and respect. Instead, they try to manipulate the system. The internet is a powerful tool that, when used properly, can produce wealth, fun, and connections. We should protect this gift the best we can.

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