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Incident Handling & Response Professional

Preparing & Defending Against Reconnaissance & Information Gathering

Section 03 | Module 01

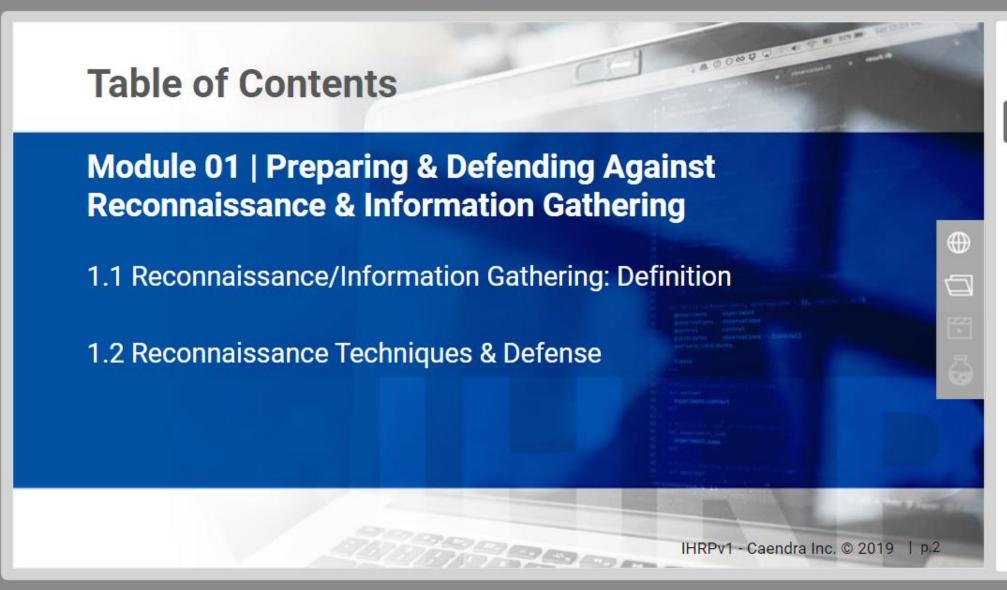


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Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should have a better understanding of:

- ✓ The reconnaissance/information techniques used by attackers
- ✓ How to prepare and defend against reconnaissance/information gathering activities

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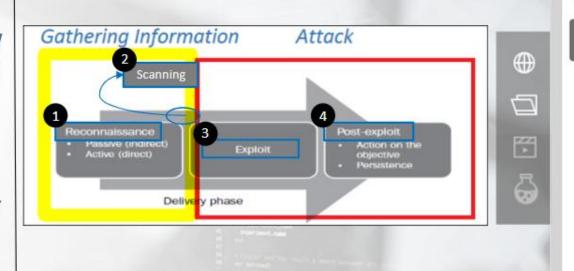
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At the end of the *Incident* Handling Process module we mentioned that we will cover how to prepare and defend against all phases of the cyber kill chain.

That being said, the cyber kill chain can be a little confusing for newcomers, so we will group attacker actions as follows.



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As you can imagine, even inexperienced attackers will not start throwing exploits against your external or internal assets before they gather as much information as possible about your network.

It is a known fact that a well-prepared attack is most likely to result in a breach.



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Unfortunately, the Internet contains massive volumes of information about organizations and their employees. Prior to an attack, malicious actors thoroughly collect (and analyze) such information from multiple open sources, in order to maximize the chances of a successful breach.



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The collection (and analysis) of information from open sources about an organization and its employees prior to an attack, is known as "The Reconnaissance / Information Gathering Phase".

From here on we will refer to The Reconnaissance / Information Gathering Phase as Reconnaissance.









- 1.1 Reconnaissance/Information Gathering: Definition
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Let's now cover the most common reconnaissance techniques used by attackers and see how we can prepare and defend against them.



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Reconnaissance Techniques & Defense



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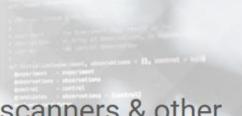
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1.2 Reconnaissance Techniques & Defense

Let's cover the reconnaissance activities that can be performed by attackers residing outside your network. Specifically, we'll cover the following reconnaissance techniques:

- Whois information analysis
- SSL certificate information analysis
- Utilization of search engines, internet-wide scanners & other sites
- DNS interrogation
- Abusing exposed OWA
- JavaScript injection



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Whenever a domain name is registered, information such as postal addresses, phone numbers, contact names and authoritative domain name servers are requested by the registrar.

This information can be the starting point of attacks such as social engineering, war dialing, war driving and network mapping.



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▼ 1.2.1 Whois information analysis



Unfortunately this information can be retrieved from open sources. Specifically, Whois databases exist throughout the internet exposing all the records that were filled during a domain name's registration.

An example of such a database is https://whois.icann.org/en





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1.2.1 Whois information analysis

You can use publicly available Whois databases or the whois Linux command to see the information that your organization is exposing.



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Gathering: Definition

1.2 Reconnaissance Techniques & Defense

▼ 1.2.1 Whois information analysis

1.2.1 Whois information analysis

1.2.1 Whois information analysis

Preparation & Defense

You can't tell when someone is looking at your organization's Whois information, but you can be proactive by closely monitoring the submitted contact email and DNS server(s).

You can also defend against illintended Whois lookups by purchasing a Whois privacy service that many registrars offer. On your right you can see an example of such a service.

Showing results for: ELEARNSECURITY.COM

Original Query: elearnsecurity.com

Contact Information

Registrant Contact

Name: Registration Private Organization: Domains By Proxy, LLC Mailing Address:

DomainsByProxy.com. Scottsdale Arizona 85260 US

Phone: +1 4806242599 Ext

Fax +1.4806242598 Fax Ext.

ELEARNSECURITY COM® domainsbyproxy.com

Admin Contact

Name: Registration Private Organization: Domains By Proxy, LLC Mailing Address:

DomainsByProxy.com. Scottsdale Arizona 85260 US Phone: +1.4806242599

Ext

Fax: +1.4806242598 Fax Ext

ELEARNSECURITY COM® domainsbyproxy.com

Tech Contact

Name: Registration Private Organization: Domains By Proxy, LLC Mailing Address:

DomainsByProxy.com, Scottsdale Arizona 85260 US

Phone: +1 4806242599

Fax: +1.4806242598 Fax Ext.

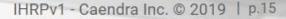
ELEARNSECURITY.COM@ domainsbyproxy.com

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1.2.1 Whois information analysis



Looking up and analyzing Whois information, is a reconnaissance technique that does not involve even a single packet being sent from the attacker to the targeted organization's network. Such reconnaissance is known as passive reconnaissance.

Passive reconnaissance techniques are particularly interesting due to the fact that they cannot be detected.



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1.2.1 Whois information analysis

Another passive reconnaissance technique you should be aware of, is gathering and analyzing SSL certificate information.

By analyzing a SSL certificate an attacker can:

- Sketch a picture of an organization's network layout (by checking the subdomains that could appear in the CN's)
- Identify provided services (by analyzing the subdomain names)
- Identify critical assets (critical assets are always SSL-protected)
- Identify internal host names, IPs or alternative DNS servers



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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

You should also know about the Certificate

Transparency initiative. This initiative enables detecting

SSL certificates that have been mistakenly issued by a
certificate authority or have been maliciously acquired. It
also makes it possible to identify certificate authorities that
have gone rogue and are maliciously issuing certificates.



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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

Why are we mentioning the Certificate Transparency initiative you may ask.

In the past, SSL certificate information was still publicly available through published results of internet wide scans. Obviously, internet wide scans could only catalog SSL certificate information of publicly reachable web sites.

What Certificate Transparency could accidentally bring to light are names intended for internal use only.







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- 1.2.1 Whois information analysis
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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis



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Find below an example of passive subdomain enumeration by analyzing SSL certificate information. By checking each of those entries, one could also identify host names of intranet machines.







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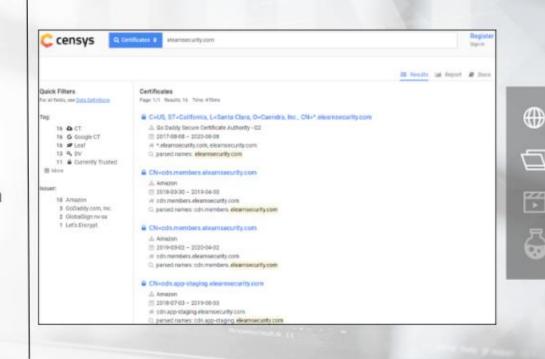
1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

Preparation & Defense

Once again, you can't tell when someone is going through your organization's SSL certificate information.

You can be proactive though, by requesting and analyzing all the information included in your organization's SSL certificates.

In addition, a great example of how you can check for sensitive information inside your organization's SSL certificates from an attacker's perspective is Censys.



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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

Preparation & Defense

Other publicly available sources to passively gather and analyze SSL certificate information are:

- https://crt.sh/
- https://developers.facebook.com/tools/ct/
- https://www.google.com/transparencyreport/https/ct/



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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

To conclude covering the passive reconnaissance techniques being used by attackers, let's see how they leverage search engines, internet-wide scanners & other sites to gather critical information about an organization.





- ▼ 1.2.1 Whois information analysis
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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide scanners & other ...

Let's start with search engines. Attackers leverage the extended visibility and features of search engines to perform passive reconnaissance activities.

Specifically, they are leveraging search engine directives and operators for targeted searches. What they also leverage is the *cache* functionality to retrieve deleted information.



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 - 1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis
- 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide scanners & other ...

Preparation & Defense

Similarly to the other passive reconnaissance techniques, you can't detect an attacker searching for information about your organization through search engines. What you can do though, is mimic the way attackers use search engines for reconnaissance purposes to identify critical information that your organization may be exposing.



Find below a great resource on how to do so. http://www.mrjoeyjohnson.com/Google.Hacking.Filters.pdf

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 - 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

Preparation & Defense

What you can also do, is minimize the information your organization is exposing through search engines. You can refer to the following resources on how to do so.

- http://web.archive.org/web/20050830204837/google.com/remove.html
- https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/16634
 19?hl=en





- 1.2.1 Whois information analysis
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 - 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...
 - 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

Preparation & Defense

Notes:

- Instead of the cache functionality of search engines, attackers are also known to use http://web.archive.org/
- 2. Some of the directives that you saw on the Google hacking resource also apply on other search engines
- Automated penetration testing tools that leverage search engines for reconnaissance are: <u>Recon-ng</u> and SearchDiggity









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- 1.2.1 Whois information analysis
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 - 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

Internet-wide "scanners" like <u>Shodan</u> or Censys are also heavily utilized by attackers. Such services scan the whole internet and can provide attackers with critical information about an organization's IP blocks, exposed services/web servers (including their version), utilized technology etc.

Armed with such knowledge attackers can passively identify vulnerable systems exposed on the internet.



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1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

> 1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis

1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide scanners & other ...

1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

A nice example of Shodan usage is the below:

https://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/tip/How-to-use-

Shodan-search-engine-to-diagnose-vulnerabilities

Shodan's REST API documentation contains all the information you will need to construct more advanced / targeted queries:

https://developer.shodan.io/api



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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

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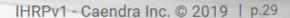
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- 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...





Preparation & Defense

The solution to prepare and defend against internet-wide "scanners" is, once again, to proactively check for critical information being exposed by them and also limit the amount of information being exposed.



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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

There is no doubt that phishing remains the top threat vector for cyber attacks. Attacking the human factor continues to be the most attractive and successful path for gaining an initial foothold.





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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

A successful phishing attack requires a target and a good social engineering pretext. Both can unfortunately be obtained through open sources.





- 1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis
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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

You organization's own website may include employee information (including e-mail addresses). Even if it doesn't, an organization's employees and their day to day activities can be identified through networking sites such LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter etc., or databases like pipl.com.







- 1.2.3 Utilization of search
- 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...
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- 1.2.2 SSL certificate information analysis
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Preparation & Defense

There is little you can do about employees sharing their company position or whereabouts. You could try enforcing a stricter information sharing policy and educate them on social engineering and the dangers of phishing attacks.







- 1.2.3 Utilization of search
- 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...
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 - 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...
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1.2.4 DNS interrogation

The Domain Name System can provide useful information about an organization. Most of the times attackers will try to dump all records from a DNS server through zone transfers. This way, they can identify internet-reachable machines.



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- 1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

▼ 1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

Preparation & Defense

To prepare against DNS-based reconnaissance you can:

- Configure the primary DNS server so that it accepts zone requests by secondary and tertiary DNS servers only
- Use split DNS
- Thoroughly harden every DNS server
- Proactively attempt a zone transfer
 - dig @[DNS_server_IP] [target_domain] -t AXFR
 - nslookup
 - > server [authoritative server IP or name]
 - > set type=any
 - > ls -d [target_domain]









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1.2.4 DNS interrogation

Preparation & Defense

As for detecting DNS-based reconnaissance, we have already covered how zone transfers look like on the wire in Section 1.



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1.2.3 Utilization of search engines, internet-wide sca...

▼ 1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

Let's continue with active reconnaissance, starting with abusing an exposed Outlook Web Access (or App) service, to perform domain name discovery.

Specifically, attackers can remotely identify an organization's Active Directory domain name by:

- 1. Leveraging known OWA inconsistences in terms of response times
- 2. Leveraging a by-design NTLM over HTTP authentication inefficiency







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▼ 1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

Knowing the Active Directory domain name is critical for attackers, since based on it they can launch password spraying* attacks, to identify valid credentials.

* Password spraying is brute-forcing an authentication mechanism by trying different usernames but the same password in each attempt. This way attackers avoid locking accounts and subsequently being detected.



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- ▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

Leveraging known OWA inconsistences in terms of response times

If one tries to authenticate with an invalid domain and an arbitrary username, the response time is going to be predictably shorter than the one regarding a request with a valid internal domain name and an arbitrary username.



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1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA



Let's see this inconsistency in action, using the MailSniper penetration testing tool.

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- ▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA
 - 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA
 - 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

https://github.com/dafthack/MailSniper

An attacker, will first need a list of random domain names and a list of likely to be valid domain names (so that the baseline response time can be calculated). This can be done with MailSniper as follows.

```
>> Import-Module .\MailSniper.ps1
```

See an example of an attacker trying to identify the internal domain name of "ELS Company" on your right

```
PS C:\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\Usera\
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Preparation & Defense

To prepare against such reconnaissance activities, you can make a list of domain names similar to the one of your organization and configure an alert every time an OWA request contains any of the domain names in that list.

You can also introduce a threshold regarding consecutive (or relatively close in terms of time) and unsuccessful OWA login requests and configure an alert every time this threshold is exceeded.



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1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

Preparation & Defense

Note:

A similar inconsistency can be met if someone compares the response times of an OWA request with the correct domain name and a non-existing username and an OWA request with the correct domain name and an existing username.



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1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

Leveraging a by-design NTLM over HTTP authentication inefficiency

By default, OWA installations contain some IIS file paths that support NTLM (NTLM over HTTP). If one sends a specifically crafted authentication request towards any of those IIS file paths, the response will include a Base64-encoded string that contains the Active Directory domain name. This happens not due to a misconfiguration but because of the way NTLM works.



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▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

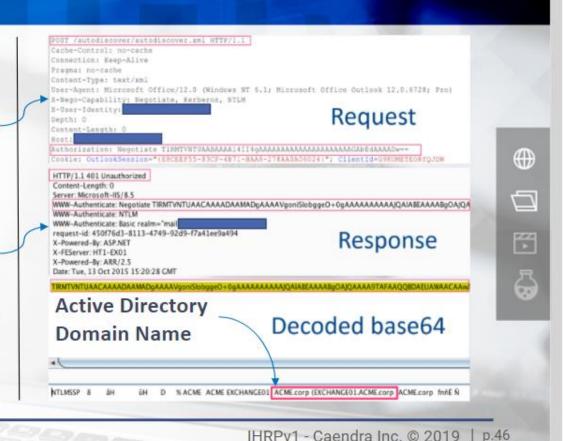
▼ 1.2.4 DNS interrogation

- 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA
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- 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

An attacker, will first send a request to an exposed OWA IIS file path that supports NTLM over HTTP (/autodiscover/autodiscover.xml in the example on your right). The Authorization header's content should be specifically crafted (you can use the header content you see on your right if you want to try this yourself).

The response will include a header named WWW-Authenticate. This header's content contains a Base64-encoded string.

If the attacker Base64-decodes the abovementioned string he/she will see the Active Directory domain name in clear text (among other information).



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▼ 1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

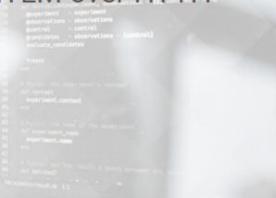
▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

Preparation & Defense

To prepare against such reconnaissance activities, you can monitor the OWA IIS file paths that support NTLM over HTTP.

Examples:

- /Autodiscover/Autodiscover.xml
- /EWS/Exchange.asmx





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1.2.4 DN5 interrogation

1.2.4 DNS interrogation

▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

The final active reconnaissance technique we will cover is reconnaissance through JavaScript injection.

Attackers are known for leveraging Cross-site Scripting vulnerabilities to inject malicious JavaScript code into otherwise benign and trusted websites. While cross-site scripting vulnerabilities are usually leveraged to attack a user's session, they can also be leveraged for reconnaissance and information gathering purposes.



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1.2.4 DNS interrogation

▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

A nice case to study in order to understand how cross-site vulnerabilities can be leveraged for reconnaissance and information gathering purposes is the Browser Exploitation Framework Project (BeEF). BeEF is a penetration testing tool that heavily utilizes client-side attack vectors.

Specifically, https://github.com/beefproject/beef/wiki/Information-Gathering contains exactly how BeEF utilizes JavaScript code to perform information gathering / reconnaissance.



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▼ 1.2.5 Abusing exposed OWA

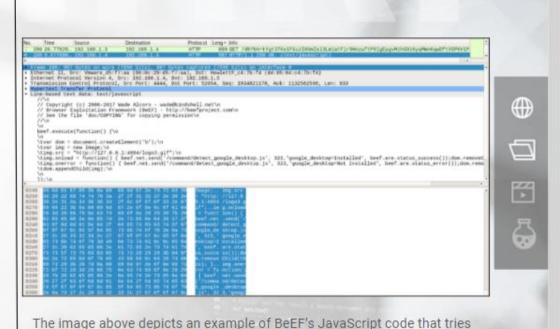
▼ 1.2.6 JavaScript injection

Preparation & Defense

An attacker will usually identify a cross-site scripting vulnerability in an organization's (trusted) website and leverage it in order to inject JavaScript code to gather information. This will be done in the form of a (specifically crafted) URL that will be sent to a intranet user.

As you can imagine incident responders will be able to retrieve and analyze every piece of JavaScript code that was loaded, if the organization has an traffic capturing capability in place.

Note that oftentimes the injected JavaScript code will be obfuscated to evade detection. Deobfuscation of JavaScript code is usually feasible though.



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to identify if Google Desktop is installed on the victim's machine.

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Preparation & Defense

Before we conclude this module, let's see how obfuscated JavaScript code looks like.

Consider the analyze.js file included in this module's resources.

If you take a quick look at it, you will notice the below.

ew Function(atob(

"dmFyIF8weDQ5ZTY9WydjYW5jZWx1ZCcsJ2Vycm9yJywnb3B0X21uX2NhbmNlbGVkJywnX2Nvbm51Y3QnLCdsYXN0UG1uZ1J1Y2Vpc dkb250S21sbFRhY1VwZGF0ZScsJ3N1dE10ZW0nLCdzdHJpbmdpZnknLCdzdGF0cycsJ19oYXNoU3RyaW5nJywnY2hhckNvZGVBdCcs

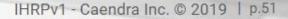
atob is used in JavaScript to perform Base64-decoding.

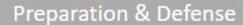


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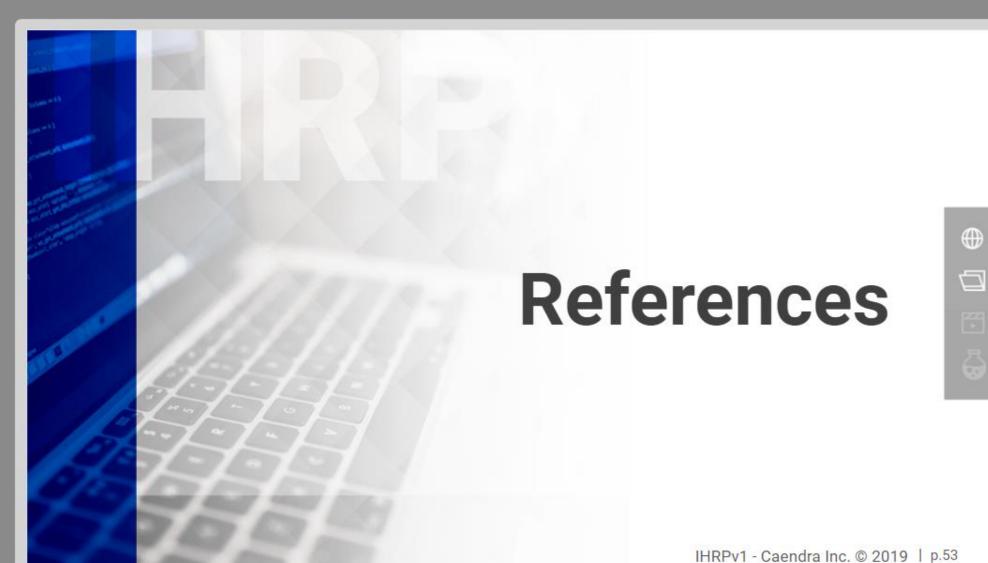
If we Base64-decode the Base64-encoded string and start analyzing it from the bottom up, we will come across the following pieces of code.

Undoubtedly we are dealing with malicious JavaScript code that is related to crypto-mining.



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Remove URLs Tool: Temporarily Block Search Results from Sites that you Own

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