

Online Game Developer, Nexon Upgrades Security with AhnLab's HackShield for Online Game 2.0

Nexon (www.nexon.co.kr) has been a leading Korean online game developer since it launched The Kingdom of the Winds, one of the world's first graphic MMORPGs, in 1996. With a long history of developing creative games in multiple genres, such as MapleStory, Mabinogi, KartRider, and Counter-Strike Online, Nexon has built a solid reputation for game quality and mass popularity.

This success grew from Nexon's core value of customer satisfaction and its focus on implementing a strong IT infrastructure that allows its patrons to enjoy games in a safe and responsive environment. To maintain its well-deserved corporate image, Nexon recently adopted AhnLab's online gaming security solution, HackShield for Online Game 2.0.

Gaming industry under constant threat

The game industry has always been afflicted by acts of infringement and continuous security risks. Widely distributed hacking tools targeting specific games and illegal programs are presumably originating from China on a regular basis. Because these tools are easy to use, they are becoming commonplace among general users and causing serious problems.

In the past, hacking attempts on games mainly targeted networks or systems, while more recent attacks are using malicious codes to steal game account information from users in order to profit from in-game items and currencies.

According to Nexon's Security Team Manager, "Games are considered an area where the latest hacking technologies are applied. It is like a space for competition between different hacking methods. Illegal programs, such as various auto-playing programs, item duplication, and hacking tools are undermining the fairness of games. Moreover, damage from malicious codes such as Trojan horses or Backdoors which target game accounts in users' PCs is still on the rise."

Faced with these challenges, Nexon is taking steps to maintain stability and fairness in their game services. The company has organized a security team to plan countermeasures against game-targeted hacking tools and implemented security infrastructures, such as intrusion prevention systems (IPSs), firewalls, virtual private networks (VPNs), anti-virus software, keyboard security, and one-time passwords (OTPs).

Swift response to new hacking methods

To more effectively cope with hacking attempts, Nexon decided to adopt AhnLab's game security solution, HackShield for Online Game 2.0. Nexon carefully weighed their options before choosing AhnLab's solution, because once adopted, game security solutions cannot be replaced easily. Because of the large time and cost investments required to apply a new security solutions across a wide range of games, the selection process must adhere to strict standards and meticulous procedures.

Nexon's Security Team Manager explains, "We adopted AhnLab's

HackShield for Online Game 2.0 mainly due to their unfailing technical service and support. Products currently available in the market do not differ much in terms of functionality, so the most important factor considered is prompt response against new hacking methods. Our decision was based on the conclusion that AhnLab has a support system that provides such services."

The most advanced technologies in the security industry are usually applied to game security solutions. However, these security solutions are up against the latest hacking techniques as well. The most important factor then becomes the response time required when new hacking tools are discovered. Minimizing damage involves precise analysis and quick pattern updates to protect against newly-discovered hacking tools.

HackShield for Online Game 2.0 prevents hacking or irregular play in the game itself, to provide users with a fair and normal gaming environment. Stronger hacking protection is made possible by functions such as expanded server linkage, memory manipulation detection, and automatic input features. Moreover, AhnLab's expert hacking defense team provides support ranging from hacking prevention to fundamental defenses, to effectively nullify hacking attempts.



Backed by excellent service and support

Once Nexon adopted HackShield for Online Game 2.0, they applied the solution to two-thirds of their published games. Nexon's Security Team Manager says, "It is rather early to evaluate the effects, as it is still in the application process. However, there are not many difficulties or conflicts during installation, and we are very satisfied with the service and technical support." He adds, "While solutions go through formal selection processes, reviews from other game providers are also important in deciding to adopt a solution. Game providers always share information regarding security matters and AhnLab's HackShield for Online Game 2.0 has received excellent appraisals."

Nexon is no stranger to AhnLab's products and services. The company has been using AhnLab's keyboard security solution (AOS Anti-Keylogger) and online personal firewall (AOS Firewall) since 2006. The keyboard security solution protects user-inputted information, such as login IDs, passwords, payments, and personal data on websites. The online personal firewall blocks unauthorized access and mitigates the risk of data corruption by detecting intrusions from unauthorized networks. These two products are automatically activated for gamers, once they are installed from the Nexon website. As the Security Team Manager explains, "Having used these products for three years, there were almost no errors or trouble, making it very convenient for the administrator. Moreover, we gained the benefit of our customers acknowledging that the service is safe."

Nexon's security efforts continue

Game service providers like Nexon can expect continued hacking attempts, despite the implementation of strong security infrastructures. These attacks are extremely common and legal protection for users is lacking. Hackers target gamers' account information through viruses, worms, and backdoor attempts. Meanwhile, users compromise their own accounts by downloading illegal programs or visiting unsafe websites. Once the account information is compromised, game service providers cannot distinguish between legitimate users and those with stolen credentials.

As a result, an emphasis must be placed on helping users acknowledge their role in the security chain. Nexon's Security Team Manager says, "From a game provider's perspective, it is most important to maintain a fair gaming environment while not affecting game speed. Security is important, but we cannot force all of our customers to use all the security solutions we provide". To reduce incidences of hacked or stolen accounts, he says, "Game users must realize the importance of security, and actively use security solutions provided by game providers".

To give users the tools to protect themselves, Nexon provides a keyboard security solution and an online personal firewall through its website. The company is also organizing an internal security center to strengthen its security protocols, and plans to expand the one-time password system to all games. In addition, security cards and a system that restricts game access to registered computers will be rolled out in the near future.

Interview

An Interview with Nexon's Security Team Manager: Technical Support Division

What is the most important factor in adopting an IT solution at Nexon?

The most important factor is the performance. We always perform a benchmarking test before introducing a product. During the evaluation, the product must meet a designated level of performance. Then, the presence of a solid technical support system is considered, as both performance and technical support are critical elements for a stable game service. Next, we consider the provider's financial status, which is closely related to the product performance and technical support. A solution provider must have stable financial resources in order to continuously invest in R&D for product upgrades and provide accessible technical support. Nexon selected AhnLab as a security solution partner based on these criteria.

What would you like to see from AhnLab in the future?

I hope they increase their manpower for faster technical support. Once a hacking attempt is discovered, the process of analyzing,

creating a pattern, and updating the product must be carried out quickly. Dozens of such new, modified hacks are discovered daily. This can be a problem that can threaten the entire security industry, not just AhnLab. Security is a very important infrastructure for the IT industry, and also to other industries as a whole. Moreover, security is a very specialized field within the industry, requiring endless human resources. Therefore, I hope that the number of security specialists and the field itself expand further in order to develop along with other industries.

Are there any security tips you would like to suggest to game users?

Always perform OS security updates so that your computer is up to date. Install security solutions, such as anti-virus software on computers where games are installed. Also, I would like to recommend using security programs provided by game providers, such as keyboard security or personal firewalls. Be careful not to access suspicious sites in order to avoid Trojan horses that can infect your computer.

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