

Interview – Giles Hogben

ENISA-expert Giles Hogben is the editor of the ENISA report *Virtual Worlds, Real Money*, which was put together by a group of industry, academic and government experts. The report warns that multiplayer online gamers are easy targets for cybercriminals who aim to steal virtual goods which can be sold for real money. Another important issue is the misuse of personal data. A survey of 1.500 respondents in the UK, Sweden and Germany shows that most people don't take issues of security and privacy in online games seriously enough.

”Giles, what were some of the findings in the survey that surprised you the most?”

”If I had to choose one result, it would be the fact that 30 % of users have recently lost some form of virtual property through fraud. For me, this is very high and it really shows how widespread the problem is. I was also surprised by the fact that almost 40 % of the respondents believe that avatars carry no private data whatsoever, when in fact they can give away a lot of information about the person behind them. This is a good indicator of the need to raise awareness on these issues. Also, the fact that in less than a year more than 30, 000 new malicious programs have been detected specifically targeting accounts and property of online games and virtual worlds, which is an increase of 145 %. Few people realise that the virtual goods market is worth 1.5 Bn Eur in real-world money”.

”Are there any examples of cases where perpetrators of these types of crimes have been apprehended and prosecuted?”

”Yes there are. As the number of people affected by these crimes is sharply increasing, slowly the number of arrests and prosecutions is rising as well. But it is worth emphasising that more often than not the police just don't respond to claims of this kind. An example: After the loss of almost \$4,000 USD in virtual goods and currency, Final Fantasy XI player Geoff Luurs brought his case before the Blaine, Minnesota police department only to be refused any kind of aid. Instead of arresting the alleged perpetrator of the virtual theft (a friend of Mr. Luurs), police investigators told Mr. Luurs that virtual items ‘are devoid of monetary value,’ and that no crime had actually been committed”.

“What do you hope this report will achieve”?

”Well, as the above mentioned example illustrates, users currently can do very little if their virtual property is stolen using malware for example. This paper aims to find ways to change that. There are 1 Bn registered players of online games worldwide and

the malware targeting them affects everyone with a computer connected to the internet. Hopefully this paper will help change the attitudes and perceptions of government and law enforcement towards the importance of protecting our citizens in this area”.

For full report:

http://www.enisa.europa.eu/doc/pdf/deliverables/enisa_pp_security_privacy_virtualworlds.pdf

For FAQ:

http://www.enisa.europa.eu/doc/pdf/faq_virtual_worlds_real_money.pdf

For press release:

http://www.enisa.europa.eu/pages/02_01_press_2008_11_20_online_gaming.html