
Apple addresses major Mac security hole

Apple has apologised for a flaw in its latest macOS operating system. Picture: AFP.

CHRIS GRIFFITH THE AUSTRALIAN 8:56AM November 30, 2017

Apple has apologised for a major security hole in its High Sierra operating system that has compromised security on Mac computers.

The breach, discovered yesterday, allows a user to login into a Mac computer as “root” with an empty password and gain administrator access after clicking the login button several times.

Further, there are concerns the bug could allow hackers access to business systems where compromised Macs are running.

The bug applies to macOS version 10.13.1 and, according to online reports, was discovered by Turkish developer Lemi Orhan Ergin. Apple has confirmed the breach, labelling it a “stumble”.

“Dear @AppleSupport, we noticed a *HUGE* security issue at MacOS High Sierra,” Ergin says in a tweet.

“Anyone can login as ‘root’ with empty password after clicking on login button several times. Are you aware of it @Apple?”

He later posted how to replicate the bug.

“You can access it via System Preferences>Users & Groups>Click the lock to make changes. Then use ‘root’ with no password. And try it for several times. Result is unbelievable!” he says in a follow-up tweet.”

Apple in a statement is apologising for the security “stumble”.

“Security is a top priority for every Apple product, and regrettably we stumbled with this release of macOS,” Apple says.

“When our security engineers became aware of the issue Tuesday afternoon (Pacific time), we immediately began working on an update that closes the security hole.

“This morning, as of 8am, the update is available for download, and starting later today it will be automatically installed on all systems running the latest version (10.13.1) of macOS High Sierra.

“We greatly regret this error and we apologise to all Mac users, both for releasing with this vulnerability and for the concern it has caused.

“Our customers deserve better. We are auditing our development processes to help prevent this from happening again.”

Cybersecurity firm Centrifly warns the bug could have a major impact on business networks.

“This simple action gives complete superuser access rights to the system, exposing all user data,” says Centrifly director of product management Peter Havens.

He says the Apple root bug could allow access through the login screen or the screen saver lock screen for Active Directory (AD)-joined Macs used in an enterprise.

“This is much more significant than the originally reported issue because it allows an admin to elevate privileges by unlocking system preferences,” he says.

“In addition, if a Mac user has ‘screen sharing’ enabled - perhaps from a previous IT support issue - the root login can be used to remotely view the user’s screen without them knowing, or login remotely.

“While there is a simple workaround - by creating a user with the name ‘root’ and setting a unique and complex password ... it highlights a fundamental but ignored gap in enterprise security.

“For many companies, the practice of reusing the same local admin password for every endpoint, and rarely, if ever, changing it continues to be common practice. If that password becomes exposed through phishing or credential theft then the attacker has unfettered access to every endpoint in the organisation.”

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JOHN DURIE

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CHRIS KENNY

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