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Palo Alto Networks CTO Nir Zuk on serious threats in networks

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With the consumerization of the web – such as with the proliferation of Twitter, Facebook and mobile apps – there are serious threats emerging. Nir Zuk, founder of Palo Alto Networks Inc., talks about the susceptibility of networks and handsets to hacker attacks and his company’s security software.

The opening Nir Zuk’s keynote speech at NetEvents 2011 APAC Summit, entitled Creative innovation on the right side of the law, highlighted the complexity of the IT security problems facing enterprises today. He explained how hackers were becoming highly professional, financially motivated, and are able easily to penetrate the perimeter defences of the corporation.

“It takes just five steps,” said Zuk, as he detailed the way that hackers target individual employees using social media, and persuade them to open a back door into the enterprise network by downloading an infected document that appears to contain information about one of their hobbies or interests.

Zuk said that it takes security companies two months to respond to such attacks because they are not widespread but highly targeted.

“If it only happens once, security vendors will not find it,” Zuk said. “And even then it can take a week or more to fix. Every executable is a suspect, and there aren’t enough security researchers in the world to fix all the vulnerabilities.”

Zuk said that his company’s firewall technology fixes the problem because it looks at all documents and executables in a virtual machine and watches for malware-like behaviour. “We do it in software in a datacentre and generate signatures for each piece of malware,” Zuk said. “We can then block it within an hour.”

Zuk created some of the first computer viruses before going straight and laying the foundations for stateful inspection, a technique now used by all firewalls, and intruder prevention systems, which offer inline protection for enterprise networks.

Following the opening plenary sessions, an audience including press and analysts representing more than 70 publications in 15 countries across the Asia Pacific region participated in a series of briefings with top execs from Arista Networks, Brocade, Extreme Networks, Fortinet, Blue Coat Systems, HP Networking, MEF, Niometrics, Sourcefire, UIH, IDC, Gartner, Analysys Mason, Market Clarity, Ovum, Forrester Research and many others.
(Courtesy: NetEvents)