

Experts say Twitter breach is troubling

By ZEN SOO
Associated Press

HONG KONG — A breach in Twitter’s security that allowed hackers to break into the accounts of leaders and technology moguls is one of the worst attacks in recent years and may shake trust in a platform politicians and CEOs use to communicate with the public, experts said Thursday.

The FBI said Thursday it is investigating the hacks, and said the high-profile accounts “appear to have been compromised in order to perpetuate cryptocurrency fraud.”

The ruse discovered Wednesday included bogus tweets from former President Barack Obama, Democratic presidential front-runner Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg and a number of tech billionaires including Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and Tesla CEO Elon Musk. Celebrities Kanye West and his wife, Kim Kardashian West, were also hacked.

Twitter said the hackers used “social engineering” to target some of the company’s employees and then gained access to the accounts. The term refers to taking advantage of human nature via phishing attacks, tricking people into downloading malicious software or compromising them by offering something in return for information. Twitter did not say how its employees were compromised.

The attackers sent out tweets from the accounts of the public figures, offering to send \$2,000 for every \$1,000 sent to an anonymous Bitcoin address.

Cybersecurity experts say such a breach could have dire consequences since the attackers were tweeting from verified, globally influential accounts with millions of followers.

“If you receive a tweet from a verified account, belonging to a well-known and therefore trusted person, you can no longer assume it’s really from them,” said Michael Gazeley, managing



Rick Bowmer/AP Photo

Unidentified hackers broke into the Twitter accounts of technology moguls, politicians, celebrities and major companies in an apparent Bitcoin scam.

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director of cybersecurity firm Network Box.

Reacting to the breach, Twitter swiftly deleted the tweets and locked down the accounts to investigate. In the process it prevented verified users from sending out tweets for several hours.

The company said Thursday it has taken “significant steps to limit access to internal systems and tools.” User passwords did not appear to have been compromised, Twitter said, so it’s not necessary for users to reset them.

Many celebrities, politicians and business leaders often use Twitter as a public platform to make statements. President Donald Trump, for example, regularly uses Twitter to post about national and geopolitical matters, and his account is closely followed by media, analysts and governments around the world. The White House said Thursday his account was secure and wasn’t jeopardized by the hacks.

Twitter faces an uphill battle in regaining people’s confidence, Gazeley said. For a start, it needs to figure out exactly which accounts were hacked and show the vulner-

abilities have been fixed, he said.

“If key employees at Twitter were tricked, that’s actually a serious cybersecurity problem in itself,” he said. “How can one of the world’s most used social media platforms have such weak security, from a human perspective?”

Rachel Tobac, CEO of Socialproof Security, said that the breach appeared to be largely financially motivated. But such an attack could cause more serious consequences.

“Can you imagine if they had taken over a world leader’s account, and tweeted out a threat of violence to another country’s leader?” asked Tobac, a social engineering hacker who specializes in providing training for companies to protect themselves from such breaches.

Tobac said companies can guard themselves against such attacks by beefing up multi-factor authentication — where users have to present multiple pieces of evidence as authentication before being allowed to log into a system.

Such a process could include having a physical token that an employee must

have with them, on top of a password, before they can log into a corporate or other private system. Other methods include installing technical tools to monitor for suspicious insider activities and reducing the number of people who have access to sensitive data, Tobac said.

This week’s case follows last year’s federal investigation of two former Twitter employees charged with spying on users for the Saudi government.

Several U.S. lawmakers called on Twitter to cooperate with authorities including the Department of Justice and the FBI to secure the site after the latest breach.

“I am concerned that this event may represent not merely a coordinated set of separate hacking incidents but rather a successful attack on the security of Twitter itself,” said U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican.

He added that millions of users relied on Twitter not just to send tweets but also communicate privately via direct messaging. Twitter hasn’t said if hackers were able to access the private messages of their high-profile targets.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey told him in a private conversation in 2018 that the company was working on protecting direct messages, known as DMs, with end-to-end encryption.

But that promise never materialized, Wyden said Thursday, leaving everyone’s private messages “vulnerable to employees who abuse their internal access to the company’s systems, and hackers who gain unauthorized access.”

“This is a vulnerability that has lasted for far too long, and one that is not present in other, competing platforms,” Wyden said in an email. “If hackers gained access to users’ DMs, this breach could have a breathtaking impact, for years to come.”

Associated Press writers Matt O’Brien, Eric Tucker, Kevin Freking and Barbara Ortutay contributed to this report.

Loss causes strange request

Dear Annie: Unfortunately, after years of declining health, my wife’s father passed away this year. The reason that I’m writing is that, since my father-in-law’s death, my wife wants me to not even bring up my dad, who is still alive. It’s very extreme. She doesn’t even want to see our daughters making arts and crafts to give to my dad.

My father is in a nursing home, and I haven’t seen him in months. I miss him very much. But since my wife’s dad died, I’m more or less not allowed to discuss my dad. She even makes me leave the room if he calls.

Is this normal, healthy behavior, and how should I handle this situation moving forward? Because whatever I say or do is, apparently, insensitive to her feelings.

— *At a Loss*

Dear At a Loss: Please accept my heartfelt condolences for the loss of your father-in-law.

Grief can make it impossible to think clearly, but that doesn’t make it acceptable to mistreat our partners. Your wife could benefit from seeing a therapist who specializes in grief. I’d also recommend attending therapy together, even if just for one or two sessions. You might also look into grief support groups in your area; if your wife isn’t ready for that yet, you can go on your own.

Keep trying to be as patient as possible, but let her know that you will keep in contact with your father. It’s not just the right thing to do for you and him but also what’s best for your marriage in the long term. If you miss spending this precious time with your dad now, you might always resent your wife for it.

Dear Annie: Your suggestions for “Striking Out,” who has been going on interviews but having no luck, were great! Can I also suggest any job applicant

do the following before the interview:

1. Check your own online identity: Facebook, Twitter, etc. Many still believe there’s truth in “You’re known by the company you keep.” So make sure that your profile blocks the ability of anyone to see who your friends are. (Sometimes our friends may not post the best things.)

2. Research the company: Examine their online personality and history. Who are their target customers? Who are the heads of the organization? See if you can find them on LinkedIn to see how they got to where they are.

3. Ask the person interviewing you: “What things do you wish *you* knew when you started working here that could have helped your success?” — *Ramona*

Dear Ramona: These are great tips. Glassdoor.com is another useful resource for job hunters. Look not just at a company’s overall rating but the individual reviews themselves: If all the reviews are either one-star or five-star, take a closer look and try to determine whether those five-star reviews are genuine. And go into the interview with your eyes wide open.

Dear Annie: You should always research the company you are interviewing with. Showing respect, interest and curiosity compliments the company for which you are interviewing. If you are interviewing for a company that makes cement, ask them about the process. If they clean windows, ask them what is their biggest job. If they clean linens, inquire about the cleaning machinery. Have follow-ups ready. It shows an appreciation for the core business. — *Timothy C.*

Dear Timothy: Astute advice: Everyone likes to be asked about themselves (or their work, in this case). I might add that this also applies to first dates!

DEAR ANNIE



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V T K B C M K Y B H P S O Q T K B Y B H
Q O Z U , Y H M O D D P S Z P V T M U C
R O Z R K O Z W I Z D P V K Z J .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FAIRY-TALE DAMSEL WITH THE MAGICAL POWER OF NEGATING FORMERLY CAST SPELLS: RESCIND-ERELLA.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals L

7-18 CRYPTOQUIP

E K F Y W A N M U A B X W F M M
T J X W R F M T K X X Y T A I D M F T T
N T X U R B E R B U A E T I A O
J F T T X B D X O I M R D K Y T ?
F R O J F B X T .
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