

SOFTWARE UNVEILED TO TACKLE ONLINE EXTREMISM, VIOLENCE

WASHINGTON: A software tool unveiled Friday aims to help online firms quickly find and eliminate extremist content used to spread and incite violence and attacks. The Counter Extremism Project, a nongovernment group based in Washington, proposed its software be used in a system similar to one used to prevent the spread of online child pornography.

The software was developed by Dartmouth University computer scientist Hany Farid, who also worked on the PhotoDNA system which is now widely used by Internet companies to stop the spread of content showing sexual exploitation or pornography involving children. The announcement comes amid

growing concerns about radical jihadists using social networks to diffuse violent and gruesome content and recruit people for attacks. "We think this is the technological solution to combat online extremism," said Mark Wallace, chief executive of the organization that includes former diplomats and public officials from the United States and other countries.

The group proposed the creation of an independent "National Office for Reporting Extremism" that would operate in a similar fashion to the child pornography center-identifying and flagging certain content to enable online firms to automatically remove it.

This system, if adopted by Internet

firms, "would go a long way to making sure that online extremist is no longer pervasive," Wallace told a conference call with journalists. He said it could be useful in stopping the "viral" spread of videos of beheadings and killings such as those produced by the Islamic State (IS) organization.

'Collaborative discussions'

Wallace said he expects "robust debate" on what is acceptable content but added that "I think we could agree that the beheading videos, the drowning videos, the torture videos... should be removed."

Wallace said the group has had "collaborative discussions" with Internet

firms and that "there has been a lot of interest." But he added that it would be up to each online operator to determine whether to use the software and how to implement it.

Farid, who also spoke on the call, said he believes the new system would be an effective tool for companies which must now manually review each complaint on objectionable content. "We are simply developing a technology that allows companies to accurately and effectively enforce their terms of service," Farid said.

"They do it anyway, but it's slow." The system is based on "robust hashing" or finding so-called digital signatures of content of text, images, audio and

video that can be tracked to enable platforms to identify and stop content from being posted or reposted.

"The technology has been developed, it has been tested and we are in the final stages of engineering to get it ready for deployment," Farid said. "We're talking about a matter of months."

Social networks have long stressed they will help legitimate investigations of crimes and attacks, but have resisted efforts to police or censor the vast amounts of content flowing through them.

Farid said he developed the software with a grant from Microsoft, and that he and the Counter Extremism Project would work to provide it to online companies. —AFP



Yasser Zeineldin CEO - eHosting DataFort.

EHDF, NETCURE & LOGRHYTHM ANNOUNCE LAUNCH OF CYBER DEFENSE CENTER

DUBAI: eHosting DataFort (eHDF), the region's leading Managed Hosting and Cloud Infrastructure services provider announced the launch of a Cyber Defense Centre (CDC) based in the UAE. The Cyber Defense Centre will offer customers a portfolio of Managed Security Services (MSS) along with Remote Managed SIEM Services. The announcement was made at a seminar hosted along with Netcure and LogRhythm at Burj Al Arab, Dubai.

Titled 'Detect & Respond Quickly to High Impact Threats', the seminar covered a range of topics and highlighted the most pressing issues connected to cyber security. The seminar discussed growing popularity of Managed Security Services which covers Advanced Threat Protection, Incident Management and Response, DDoS Protection, Endpoint Security Management, etc. The importance of Managed Security Services and how customers can benefit from end-to-end security lifecycle management was also outlined.

"Security threats are at an epidemic level. Volume Zero day threats have more than doubled in the last 12 months from 23 in 2014 to 54 in 2015", said Jeff Ogden, Managing Director of the eHDF Cyber Defense Centre. "Targeted attacks aimed at customers has seen a 54% growth and the most important focus of the CDC is to deliver the highest levels of security. This will be delivered either within the Data Centre, on premise at the Customers site or in the Cloud".

The seminar included talks on threat landscape, the role of Managed Security Services in the modern day context and the importance of modernizing threat detection & response. The seminar also saw LogRhythm conduct a demo on their SIEM solution.

"At a time when data breaches and hacking are on the rise, it is crucial for organiza-

tions to be prepared to combat these attacks. Today, it is imperative to implement cyber security processes that help companies efficiently respond in real time to protect their critical data. We have always worked towards educating our customers about technology innovations that will help them grow their business. Seminars such as 'Detect & Respond Quickly to High Impact Threats' will help us spread the message on how organizations can prepare to secure their data. With the need for specialized skills required to tackle security issues, Managed Security Services can help curtail budgets. It will also have professionals look into the highly specialized areas of Information Security," said, Yasser Zeineldin, CEO, eHosting DataFort.

Seeking to highlight the growing importance of Managed Security Services (MSS) to an audience of CIO's in the UAE, eHDF also conducted a survey to track MSS trends in the region. Among the findings of the survey, 18% indicated interest in Managed Data Loss Prevention, 26% in Cloud Security and 29% in SIEM in 2016. 15%, 29% and 21% respondents also indicated interest in Vulnerability Management, Advanced Threat Protection and Mobile Security respectively.

"We can assist customers in the complete end-to-end security lifecycle which include patching services, collecting and analyzing security data. The services also include incident management which offers a single dashboard of their security posture, attacks, and incidents. In addition, our unique OPEX based approach allows eHDF to pass on tangible cost benefits to customers planning to procure new security technologies. Purchasing capital assets through eHDF on an OPEX Model eliminates the need for lengthy evaluation and procurement. It also provides ongoing monthly based payment plans for our customers," concluded Yasser.

IN ISRAELI DESERT, WORLD'S HIGHEST SOLAR TOWER LOOKS TO FUTURE

ASHALIM, Israel: In the middle of southern Israel's desert, engineers are hard at work building the world's tallest solar tower, reflecting the country's high hopes for renewable energy.

Once completed in late 2017, the Ashalim Tower will rise to 240 meters (787 feet), taller than Paris's Montparnasse Tower and London's Gherkin, according to the Israeli government and the consortium building it.

Covered in stainless steel, the square tower in the rocky Negev desert with a peak resembling a giant lighthouse will be visible from dozens of kilometers away. A field of mirrors covering 300 hectares (740 acres) — the size of more than 400 football pitches — will stretch out from its base, directing sunlight toward the tower's peak to an area called the boiler, which looks like a giant light bulb.

The boiler, whose temperature will rise to 600 degrees Celsius (1112 Fahrenheit), generates steam that is channeled towards the foot of the tower, where electricity is produced. The construction, costing an estimated 500 million Euros (\$570 million), is being financed by US firm General Electric, with France's Alstom and Israeli private investment fund Noy also involved.

Clean at a cost

Israel's government launched a tender for the project in 2013, committing to purchase electricity from it over 25 years as part of a shift towards renewable energy and energy independence.

The country mainly generates electricity

using plants fired by coal, natural gas and fuel oil. Its domestic supply of natural gas has grown with the discovery of fields in the Mediterranean.

Solar requires a major investment, though costs are gradually coming down. Energy from a solar tower is "two to three times more expensive to produce than classic electricity plants using carbon or fuel," said Eran Gartner, who heads the Megalim consortium managing the project.

The tower should provide 121 megawatts, or two percent of Israel's electricity needs, enough for a city of 110,000 households. The country of eight million people is seeking to make renewable energy account for 10 percent of its total consumption by 2020.

Solar power offers a clean alternative to fuel- and carbon-fired electricity plants, which contribute to global warming with their heat-trapping CO2 emissions. "The government agreed to move ahead with this technology-even though we do not hide the fact that it is more expensive than traditional electricity production-precisely to achieve lower costs over time," Gartner said at the site.

"The second solar tower will be slightly less expensive, the third much less expensive, et cetera." He predicted a futuristic landscape of towers overlooking the desert. Israel could in theory meet all its electricity needs through solar energy by using only four percent of the Negev desert, said Eitan Parnass, head of the Green Energy Association of Israel. —AFP

HOTELIERS ACCELERATE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

AVAYA REPORTS 40% INCREASE IN REGIONAL HOSPITALITY BUSINESS

DUBAI: Hotel owners in the Middle East

are embracing digital transformation initiatives to create unparalleled guest experiences, and stand out from competitors, Avaya announced today. With occupancy levels and average daily rates declining across the region, hoteliers are tapping solutions from Avaya, a global leader in business communications software, systems and services, to modernize their services, produce new revenue streams and enhance operational efficiency.

Avaya's regional hospitality business grew 40% in the first half of the company's fiscal year, even as the Middle East and Africa were the only regions worldwide to post declines in occupancy and average daily rate (ADR), according to research firm STR Global, with ADR in the Middle East dropping 10.8% in April. Weak oil prices, geopolitical instability and reduced demand are weighing on hotels, leading to hoteliers seeking solutions that can reduce total cost of ownership while still delivering superior guest experiences.

Frederick Sabty, Vice President Hospitality Solutions, World Wide Avaya, said: "With the region preparing for major events such as Expo 2020 in Dubai and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022, hotels need to offer compelling experiences and differentiated services to stand out from the crowd. Today's traveler is no longer satisfied with the traditional Hotel Experience - they expect seamless connectivity across multiple devices, real-time access to information and services, customized in-room entertainment and an individualized experience that meets their own unique needs."

Minor Hotel Group (MHG), owner and operator of hotels and resorts in 22 countries, has deployed innovative unified communications, contact center and networking solutions from Avaya across its hotels in the region, as part of its plans to increase its foot-

print in the Middle East.

Hari Nair, Director of Technology Middle East, Minor Hotel Group, said: "Minor Hotel Group is committed to delivering the perfect guest experience and exceeding our visitors' expectations every time. With Avaya, we are able to

across the industry, with Avaya seeing an increasing range of hotels investing in digital strategies to enhance their guest experience, while hoteliers are also looking to consolidate their ICT infrastructure and resources, and focus on total cost of ownership.

tomers to 'share' their experience on the go. Hotels are also able to build up data banks based on customer feedback and fine-tune their service to further improve the guest experience based on their profiles.

In-room experience, with a shift



Frederick Sabty, Vice President-Hospitality Solutions, Avaya.

deliver the mobile, interactive, secure experiences that our guests deserve, meeting their needs today and for the future. Avaya solutions allow us to deliver innovative services quickly, enhance operational efficiency, and reduce total cost of ownership, while powering our digital transformation journey."

The digital transformation drive is

Digitally transformed organizations in the hospitality sector can benefit from:

Mobility solutions to enable employees and guests to access their preferred services securely from anywhere on the property, and on their preferred mobile devices;

Social integration, to enable cus-

from guests having to dial multiple numbers for services to being able to interact with a single agent who is contextually aware of the guest.

In the GCC, more than 80 per cent of all local hotel brands work with Avaya on transforming the guest experience, and globally, eight out of every 10 hospitality brands use Avaya solutions.



JIA ZHANGKE PLANS VIRTUAL REALITY ROMANCE

BEIJING: Critically acclaimed Chinese director Jia Zhangke says he will make a virtual reality film next year with a romantic story as he and viewers get used to the new medium, and declared: "I think VR is going to be the next big thing."

The director, better known for films that depict China's social changes and acts of violence, told The Associated Press that the short film would be a gentle romance as "it takes time for people to feel comfortable" in virtual reality. "The speed and direction of movements may make people feel physically uncomfortable, so we're starting with a romantic story," he said in an interview.

Virtual reality entertainment consists largely of video games, but film festivals are starting to showcase VR films as directors venture into the new medium. It offers a much more solitary experience compared to watching a movie in a packed theater.

VR requires a headset that blocks out your surroundings and lets you wander through a story in a different world - either by moving a few steps in various directions or sitting on a swivel chair and moving your body to look around a 360-degree scene.

The fake environment is, nonetheless, often realistic, but movie makers are still trying to work out how to tell a story in VR. "I am still learning about VR and trying to understand it at the moment, but I'm very interested in this new technology which lets us view space from different angles," Jia said Saturday. It also gives the audience more power as they

choose what to watch. "In the past, the audience could only imagine the world inside and outside the frame," he said. "VR liberates an audience and allows people to independently choose what we want to be concerned with. Audiences become more important."

"Today, we can divert our attention from the close-up shot in a traditional film that we had to watch in the past," added the 46-year-old Jia. "I think



BEIJING: Chinese director Jia Zhangke speaks at an event.—AP

it's a brand new and valuable idea."

Earlier Saturday, Jia spoke at an event with Richard Pei-zi, former director of the New York Film Festival, who told him that he felt the VR medium impinged on the ability of a director to tell a story. Pei-zi recalled a short VR detective film he had seen in which "the filmmaker wanted me to look left but I wanted to look right."

Jia said he thought the filmmaker "probably did a bad job" and suggested a director could deploy actors whose movements could direct a viewer's attention. Jia has explored China's rapid transformation throughout his career, which includes early underground films, documentaries and international film festival prize winners, 2006 "Still Life" and 2013 "A Touch of Sin." He spent years making underground films before censors allowed his first movie to be released in Chinese cinemas in 2004.

Jia will next month launch his own video streaming site, "Jia Screen," that he said would premiere 108 short films from around the world. Jia told the audience at the talk organized by Columbia Global Center in Beijing that while today's technology and various streaming websites in China allowed people to make and upload their own films, those weren't being seen because the public didn't know which of the thousands to watch.

His platform will "work as a bridge to bring the information to the audiences instead of asking the audiences to do the job themselves," he said. —AP

HACKERS DIVERT \$50M IN BLOW TO VIRTUAL CURRENCY

NEW YORK: Hackers have diverted more than \$50 million in digital currency from an experimental fund meant to demonstrate that such money is safe for use, according to the New York Times.

The sum was stolen from a project called the Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO), which had collected the money in Ether, a form of currency similar to Bitcoin. The hacking, which

siphoned off a third of the project's digital money, is likely to doom the investor-funded project, the Times reported Friday.

Blockchain, the technology that drives cryptocurrency such as Ether, has recently been gaining traction in the world of finance, where it could one day prove potentially useful. In recent months, however, computer scientists had indicated that vulnera-

bilities existed in the project's code, the Times reported.

Programmers Friday were debating whether to simply change the code so that the money could be recuperated, or whether such meddling broke with the project's basic tenets. "I recognize that there are very heavy arguments on both sides, and that either direction would have seen very heavy opposition,"

Vitalik Buterin, the founder and lead programmer on the Ethereum project, which hosts Ether, said on Reddit.

The hack sent the price of Ether plunging Friday. Similarly, Bitcoin took a hard hit after the Tokyo-based Mt Gox trading exchange declared bankruptcy early in 2014 due to a fortune in digital currency vanishing or being stolen. —AFP