

Intel Security Flaw

By Jeff Verry

The headlines in recent weeks have been pretty grim:

- *Intel Chip Flaw: Millions Of Android Smartphones May Need To Be Replaced For Users To Stay Safe*
- *A Critical Intel Flaw Breaks Basic Security For Most Computers*
- *Critical Flaws Revealed To Affect Most Intel Chips Since 1995*

What does this mean?

Engineers at Google have found out that there is a flaw in how computer processor chips have been designed. When more than one program is running on a computer, this flaw could potentially allow one program to look at the data being used by another program. Think about kids cheating on one another during a quiz in school and you get the idea.

Why is this a big deal? (The bad news)

It is a major security vulnerability. It allows a malicious program, if installed, to bypass just about any security measure that can be installed.

It is pervasive. This could affect as high as 8 out of 10 computers, and possibly phones as well. The flaw is present in the processors that run PCs, Macs, Linux machines, servers and possibly others.

The fix will cause performance issues. Almost all manufacturers are in the process of issuing fixes. The patches, when they are in place, by definition will slow computers down because it is changing the way the main processor works.

Is the sky falling? (not necessarily)

There are those that hold that this might not be as big a deal as others are saying. This is fairly common in this industry. John Pitzer, an analyst at Credit Suisse, has four main reasons for thinking that everyone is making "mountains from molehills" regarding the Intel chip flaw.

Hackers could potentially see sensitive information, but can't change it.

Google, which originally discovered the flaw, said that it impacts more than just Intel CPUs.

It will soon be patched with software and eliminated in new hardware.

It is not expected to change Intel's timing of new products.

At *CCS Technologies*, we are always cautious about jumping on bandwagons. At the same time, we take the trust our clients put in us very seriously. We have to continually balance Chicken Little versus the Boy Who Cried Wolf. In this case we would want to err on the side of safety and operations.

So, what do I do now?

In the short term, not much. Manufacturers are busy working on patches. One piece of good news is that the news on this was deliberately delayed 6 months to give the good guys a head start in the race against the bad guys. Is there any lemonade to be made here?

Yes. While computers will initially slow down because of the additional layer of security needs to patch the flaw, because this is an inherent design flaw, the way computer processors are designed needs to be reworked. Some analysts believe that this may actually lead to faster processors and more computer power going forward.

We are monitoring this situation very closely. As more becomes known, we will keep you informed via email alerts. If you have any questions on your particular hardware, do not hesitate to call one of our technicians and we can guide you through.



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