

Twitter bug zaps followers (Update)

May 10 2010



The internet homepage of the microblogging website Twitter. Twitter was hit by a bug Monday that caused users of the micro-blogging service to lose the followers of their accounts.

Twitter was bitten by a bug on Monday that caused users of the fast-growing micro-blogging service to temporarily lose the list of followers of their accounts.

"We identified and resolved a bug that permitted a user to 'force' other users to follow them," Twitter said.

"We're now working to roll back all abuse of the bug that took place," the San Francisco-based start-up said in a blog post.

Earlier Monday, popular technology blog Gizmodo published details about the bug explaining to Twitter users how they could force any other

user to follow their account.

"Follow this dead-simple guide to force any Twitter user -- from Oprah (Winfrey) to (Ashton) Kutcher -- to follow you. No, seriously," said Gizmodo.com, which was also in the news last month after it obtained and published details about the latest iPhone prototype from Apple.

Talk show host Winfrey has 3.5 million followers and follows 426 people while Hollywood star Kutcher has 4.8 million followers and follows 732 people.

Twitter's efforts to close the hole briefly left a number of users -- including Kutcher -- with zero followers although the delivery of messages did not appear to have been affected.

The Twitter account of technology blog TechCrunch.com, for example, went from 1.4 million followers to zero.

Gizmodo said the bug was discovered by a Turkish Twitter user who "figured out accidentally that if you tweet 'accept username,' for example billgates, then Bill Gates will follow you."

"For hours, thousands of people were able to take control of other people's Twitter accounts with a trick so easy that even the newest Twitterer could execute it," Gizmodo said.

Twitter, which allows users to pepper their followers with messages of 140 characters or less, said last month that it has topped 105 million registered users and is adding 300,000 new accounts a day.

The follower bug led to a flood of jokes on Twitter about the problem.

"Today's Twitter follow count crash is like last week's Stock Market

crash, but bruising millions of egos 'stead of losing millions of dollars," Xeni Jardin, co-editor of Boingboing.net, said in a "tweet."

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Citation: Twitter bug zaps followers (Update) (2010, May 10) retrieved 18 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-05-twitter-bug-zaps.html>

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