

Free app protects Facebook accounts from hackers

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From left, Harsha Madhyastha, an assistant professor of computer science and engineering; Michalis Faloutsos, a professor of computer science and engineering; and Md Sazzadur Rahman and Ting-Kai Huang, both Ph.D. students in computer science

(PhysOrg.com) -- Two University of California, Riverside graduate students and a company run by an alumnus of the school have partnered to develop a free Facebook application that detects spam and malware posted on users' walls and news feeds.

Md Sazzadur Rahman and Ting-Kai Huang, both Ph.D. students in [computer science](#) at the Bourns College of Engineering, created [MyPageKeeper.org](#) to provide real-time protection from viruses and phishing and spam campaigns for the 700 million [users](#) of [Facebook](#).

They did so in conjunction with StopTheHacker.com, a web protection service founded in 2009 by Anirban Banerjee, who received his Ph.D. in 2008 from UC Riverside, and Michalis Faloutsos, a professor of computer science and engineering at the university. Faloutsos and Harsha Madhyastha, an assistant professor of computer science and engineering, are advising the two Ph.D. students.

MyPageKeeper is a response to a recent surge of malicious activity on Facebook. This includes the distribution of fake links luring users into free flights on Southwest Airlines and videos of Osama Bin Laden's death, and also news that 1.5 million Facebook user names and passwords were for sale on an underground hacker forum.

"Facebook is the new web," Rahman said. "It provides a fertile ground to spread malware, since users trust links and posts that are seemingly from their friends. Hackers have realized this, and they have started using it to distribute malware and conduct identity theft."

The application works by continuously scanning wall-posts, news-feeds and links posted by friends of participating users. As soon as malware, spam or other undesirable material is detected, MyPageKeeper notifies the user and enables the user to remove the malicious content from their profile.

MyPageKeeper, which the students started working on three months ago, can be downloaded for free by going to www.MyPageKeeper.org. Hundreds of users are already using the service.

Faloutsos, who has studied [web security](#) for 15 years, believes web security is following the same trajectory as desktop security.

Ten years ago, people didn't think much about desktop security. Today, nearly every desktop has antivirus software. Today, not many people

think much about web security. But, in the coming years they will, largely because of social networks.

“People are educated about e-mail spam,” Faloutsos said. “But, now there is an implicit trust, almost validation, when someone sees a post from a friend on Facebook.”

StopTheHacker.com, which is based in Riverside, was working on Facebook security applications when Rahman and Huang approached them, said Banerjee, the co-founder of, and chief security officer at, StopTheHacker.com.

The company, which received a \$500,000 National Science Foundation Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) grant last year after getting a \$100,000 SBIR grant in 2009, provided the students with money to design a logo and web site. The company also provided data and services that detect spam and malware.

“The project is a no-brainer,” Banerjee said. “We have to protect people on Facebook because it’s the new face of the internet.”

Provided by University of California, Riverside

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