

Microsoft offers big money prize for foiling hackers

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The Microsoft booth is seen during the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show at the Las Vegas Convention Center, January 2011. Microsoft on Wednesday kicked off a contest aimed at turning the tables on hackers by offering big money prizes for innovative tactics to foil cyber attacks.

Microsoft on Wednesday kicked off a contest aimed at turning the tables on hackers by offering big money prizes for innovative tactics to foil cyber attacks.

The US software titan launched the premier BlueHat Prize competition at a major Black Hat computer security conference in Las Vegas.

"As the risk of criminal attacks on private and government computer systems continues to increase, Microsoft recognizes the need to stimulate research in the area of defensive computer security technology," said Microsoft Trustworthy Computer Group general manager Matt Thomlinson.

"Our interest is to promote a focus on developing innovative solutions rather than discovering individual issues," he continued.

Microsoft opted to offer prizes for defending against entire types of cyber attacks instead of simply paying "bounties" to those that discover individual computer bugs.

BlueHat promised more than \$250,000 dollars in cash and other prizes to software savants as young as 14 years old. The theme for the first year of the contest was preventing hacks exploiting computer memory vulnerabilities.

Microsoft said it hoped the contest would inspire contributions from researchers, security professionals, and even young hackers.

"Some of the value in this prize is beyond money; it is inspiring not just the current generation but the next generation," said Microsoft lead security strategist Katie Moussouris.

"We have found that some of our best defenders come from the opposite side of the security coin," she added.

BlueHat Prize entries will be evaluated by an internal panel of judges at Microsoft, with \$200,000 going to the top submission and \$50,000

awarded to the second place finisher.

The third-place prize will be a subscription to Microsoft services worth \$10,000.

BlueHat winners will be revealed at the Black Hat gathering in Las Vegas next year. Information about the contest was available online at bluehatprize.com.

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