

Microsoft pays big to strengthen software defense

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A woman works on her computer at a coffee shop on July 25. As hackers from around the world converged on Las Vegas, Microsoft doled out a quarter million dollars in prize money to researchers who found ways to thwart attacks on its software.

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The winners of Microsoft's first Blue Hat prize were unveiled at a hip club at a mobbed party complete with dancers, high-energy DJ, and [explosions](#) of shimmering confetti.

A top prize of \$200,000 went to doctoral student Vasilis Pappas for an advance in countering "the most popular attack techniques we're seeing

today," said Microsoft security response center senior director Mike Reavey.

"We posed a challenge to the researcher community and asked them to shift their focus from solely identifying and reporting individual vulnerabilities to investing in new lines of defensive research that could mitigate entire classes of attacks," Reavey said of the prize.

Microsoft awarded \$50,000 to the second-place finisher, and a fortune in software to the researcher who placed third out of the 20 submissions entered in the Blue Hat competition.

Technology from the finalists has been integrated into a software toolkit for protecting against threats, according to Microsoft trustworthy computer group general manager Matt Thomlinson.

"The Blue Hat prize is more than a competition; it's the future of security defense, where the community comes together to collectively take on some of the toughest problems we face and make the computing ecosystem safer," Thomlinson said.

Each of the top three entries dealt with a way cyber attackers twist [snippets](#) of benign software already in a [computer system](#) to malicious ends, according to Microsoft.

The Blue Hat winners were announced as a [Black Hat](#) conference of computer security professionals gave way to the largest known gathering of hackers, Def Con, which ends Sunday.

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