

Hackers might be a pain, but we need them, expert says

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Sure, they might take your credit card information, stop you from watching Netflix and figure a way to use any key fob to access your car, but don't think too poorly of hackers.

Their mindset drives innovation that benefits humanity, said inventor, futurist - and hacker - Pablos Holman.

"You need that discovery process to get every [new technology](#)," he said, noting hackers' propensity to disassemble [new gadgets](#) immediately.

"They flip it over, take out all the screws, break it into a lot of little pieces - but then figure out what can we build from that rubble.

"It's that discovery process that starts every [new invention](#), every new innovation," Holman said. "You can't get a new invention by reading the directions. That's never happened before. That never will happen."

Many technologists distinguish between hackers working to improve software and those working to exploit it, a divide known as white hat and black hat. The FBI is among the organizations that hire white-hat hackers.

As the keynote speaker at IoT Emerge, a three-day conference in Chicago of sessions, demonstrations and tours, Holman outlined the mayhem and shenanigans of fellow hackers and some of his own experiences. Those include building a robot that shows strangers their passwords in public places, designing a Bluetooth surveillance system

that allowed him to track the activities of a Microsoft privacy executive at a computers and privacy conference, and figuring out how to reuse remote car keys to unlock all the cars from a single manufacturer.

He slammed industries - the auto industry, in particular - for leaving customers vulnerable to such hacks, particularly as more computerized parts and features are used.

"All this stuff is just rolling computers," Holman said. "These guys are gonna learn the hard way a whole lot of things you and I already know."

There needs to be a way to make it easier to fix software on cars, he said.

"We had problems, we invented systems updates. Where's the system update on your car?" Holman said. "Nowadays, they roll into the dealership and swap out a car like they always do. But they'll catch on."

Still, it's hard to account for everything that might compromise a system. Hackers, he said, help by identifying vulnerabilities.

"You don't have the time to think of all the screwed up stuff some hacker can do with it. But they've got the time - they're gonna find out what's wrong wherever you go."

Holman said he's enlisted [hackers](#) to work with him at the Bellevue, Wash.-based Intellectual Ventures Laboratory, where ideas include a machine to suppress hurricanes, a system to reverse global warming, a fission reactor powered by nuclear waste, and mosquito-targeting laser system to eliminate malaria.

"We basically bought one of every tool in the world, hired one of every kind of scientist, put them all on the same team and tried to start going

after the biggest problems we can find," he said.

Technology, he said, is responsible for overcoming hurdles that kept humans from thriving, and will be instrumental in solving some of the resulting concerns including food, housing and employment for a growing population, Holman said.

"Our job is to figure out how we're gonna solve those problems at a scale," he said. "We solve every one of them with a new technology - not government, not religion, not some election."

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