Beat: Technology

Apple says celebrity accounts were victim of very targeted attack...

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USPA News - Dozens of celebrities who had their accounts accessed by cyber criminals and nude photographs stolen were the victim of "a very targeted attack" on their accounts, Apple said on Tuesday, assuring other users that none of its systems had been compromised. "When we learned of the theft, we were outraged and immediately mobilized Apple`s engineers to discover the source. Our customers` privacy and security are of utmost importance to us," the technology giant said in a media advisory on Tuesday, about two days after cyber criminals released scores of nude photographs of several celebrities, including Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence.

Apple said its initial investigation found that certain celebrity accounts were compromised by "a very targeted attack" on user names, passwords and security questions. "None of the cases we have investigated has resulted from any breach in any of Apple`s systems including iCloud or Find my iPhone," the statement said. No other details were provided. Security experts have said that a recent flaw in Apple software allowed cyber criminals to access the accounts of celebrities, including Apple`s iCloud service which automatically stores copies of photos taken by iPhones. The bug allowed a malicious user to repeatedly guess passwords on Apple`s "Find my iPhone" service without alerting the user or locking out the attacker. Laura Eimiller, a spokeswoman for the FBI`s Los Angeles Field Office, said earlier on Tuesday that the FBI was investigating the case. "The FBI is aware of the allegations concerning computer intrusions and the unlawful release of material involving high profile individuals, and is addressing the matter," she said. Apple`s statement said it was working with law enforcement to help identify those responsible, but no arrests had been made yet. The case first emerged on Sunday morning when hundreds of photos and several videos were posted by an unidentified person to imageboard website 4chan. The stolen images quickly spread on social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook when several of the victims confirmed that the photos were authentic. The person who published the photos claimed he had received the images from someone else, who he said was still attempting to sell nude photos of about other 100 celebrities, including Hillary Duff, Kim Kardashian, Kirsten Dunst, Mary-Kate Olsen, McKayla Maroney, Rhianna, Selena Gomez, and Vanessa Hudgens. "The dude wanted 2btc for one set," the person said, referring to the digital cryptocurrency Bitcoin, which currently trades at about $475 per bitcoin. The vast majority of stolen photos were not published by Tuesday evening, but photos and videos belonging to about a dozen celebrities were being circulated online, including some which were confirmed to be authentic. Representatives of both Lawrence and `Sports Illustrated` model Kate Upton said authorities had been notified. Fashion model Ali Michael appeared to have been the worst hit, with nearly 150 photos and seven videos of her being circulated online. Although she did not immediately comment on whether the images were authentic, a brief update on her Twitter account appeared to refer to the images. "Cool," she wrote as word spread about the images, in which she appears mostly topless. Upton was also hit hard, with more than 100 photos and several videos having been published, including nude and intimate images that show her together with her partner, Justin Verlander. Eight photographs of `Glee` actress Becca Tobin - some of which show her nude next to a Christmas tree - were also being circulated, to which the actress responded on Twitter: "Merry XXXmas!" Actress Mary Elizabeth Winstead, who is best known for her roles in `Final Destination 3` and two of the `Die Hard` movies, was furious at the release of at least six nude photos. "To those of you looking at photos I took with my husband years ago in the privacy of our home, [I] hope you feel great about yourselves," she wrote on Twitter. Dozens of photographs said to show `Nickelodeon` star Victoria Justice, including several in which her breasts are exposed, were also being circulated, though the actress claimed they were fake. "These so called nudes of me are FAKE people. Let me nip this in the bud right now. pun intended," she wrote on her Twitter account. Internet users who compared the nude photos to known photos of Justice noticed similarities in the surroundings and clothing, and were certain the photos were authentic. Gossip website HollywoodLife, citing an unidentified source close to Justice, reported that the actress was "flipping out" over the situation and had expressed shock that other celebrities had confirmed the authenticity of the photos. English actress Jessica Brown Findlay, who is best known for her role in `Downton Abbey,` was also a victim of the theft, with eleven photos and seven videos being circulated, some of which show her in extremely intimate situations with a partner. Australian actress Teresa Palmer and `Spider-Man` actress Kirsten Dunst were also victims of the theft. In a similar case in December 2012, Christopher Chaney of Jacksonville, Florida, was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison after he hacked into the personal e-mail accounts of more than 50 people, including actresses Scarlett Johansson, Mila Kunis and Renee Olstead. He later posted several nude photographs of Johansson.

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