Uber Data Breach Gets Ugly â€" Accusations of Corporate Espionage Fly

October 12, 2015 â€" It is no understatement to say that there is no love lost between Uber and Lyft; the countryâ€™s two largest ride sharing services. Last year it was revealed that Uber had experienced a data breach involving information on the companyâ€™s 50,000 drivers. Now there are accusations that the breach was caused by an executive at competing firm Lyft and a judge has ordered that certain internet records on an anonymous individual (suspected to be the aforementioned Lyft executive) maintained by Comcast be turned over to Uber. That order is currently being appealed. Calling the situation ugly is probably an understatement.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
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  var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
  po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
  var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
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In my opinion, the data breach at Uber was caused by carelessness. An employee posted a snippet of computer code on the website GitHub; a site used by computer programmers to share code and find solutions to programming problems. Unfortunately for Uber, the code snipped contained an access key for Uberâ€™s driver database. To make matters worse, the code remained public for months.

Eventually, someone found that access key and used it. Uber, through its own investigation, came to believe that person was Chris Lambert; Lyftâ€™s Chief Technology Officer. It is an accusation that both Lyft and Lambert deny.

To confirm the companyâ€™s suspicions, Uber filed a John Doe lawsuit to get Comcast â€" an ISP that Uber claims is related to the breach â€" to reveal the identity of a particular subscriber. Uber believes that subscriber is Lambert or someone close to him. And now a judge has issued such an order. That decision is currently being appealed by the unknown John Doe who was presumably notified of the order by Comcast.

Uber has also asked for, and received, a subpoena for GitHubâ€™s records. They want to learn the identities of anyone who visited the page where their access key was publically posted. Just a reminder here that as previously stated, it was an Uber employee who made that information public.

It is likely that this saga will drag on in the courts for some time. It is equally likely that the relationship between these two companies will remain tense. While it is true that if another company used Uberâ€™s information to access computer information without authorization, that company probably violated a variety of federal and state laws against cyber intrusion and should be held accountable. But none of these things will change the fact that this data breach appears to have been a self-inflicted wound by Uber. No amount of legal shenanigans will change that. And nobody should forget it.
byJim Malmberg
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