Malware-Laden Android Devices Secretly Enlist Owners in Cybercrime

March 11, 2025 - Millions of low-cost Android devices-including streaming boxes, tablets, and car systems-are unknowingly aiding cybercriminals, according to new research. A massive malware campaign, dubbed Badbox 2.0, has turned these devices into tools for ad fraud and other online scams.

Cybersecurity firm Human Security found that scammers infect devices through malicious apps and downloads. Users may install what appear to be legitimate games or utilities, only to unknowingly grant criminals access. Some fraudsters also create â€œevil twinâ€• apps-safe versions on Google Play, but infected copies available elsewhere-to spread malware. Once compromised, these devices allow hackers to route internet traffic through them, masking illicit activities.

Most infected devices come from unknown brands running open-source Android versions rather than Google-certified software. Many are sold under generic names, making them hard to identify. While Brazil has been a major hotspot, researchers believe the botnet could affect millions worldwide.

Google has tried to curb the impact by removing malicious apps from the Play Store and blocking fraudulent ad activity, but consumers remain the first line of defense. Experts recommend sticking to reputable brands, downloading apps only from official stores, keeping software updated, and using security tools to detect threats.

With the rise of malware-infected gadgets, consumers need to be cautious when buying electronics, especially low-cost Android devices. Experts recommend:

- Sticking to reputable brands â€“ Cheap, no-name devices may come with hidden risks.
- Only downloading apps from official stores â€“ Avoid sideloading apps from third-party websites.
- Keeping software updated â€“ Regular updates help patch security flaws.
- Using security tools â€“ Consider antivirus apps that scan for malicious activity.

That bargain streaming box may not be such a steal after all-it could be selling off your privacy.
by Jim Malmberg
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