

Julie Likes Silicon

"Hey I found your profile online and wanted to know if you would like to chat. Add me to MSN messenger to chat and maybe cam!!"



Randy Abrams

So began the email my friend received. What was this all about? What is the goal of such a message?

People often have lots of profiles online. Was it an eBay profile? MSN? Adult Friend Finder? Vague, but believable is one of the hallmarks of simple social engineering attacks. If the message had said "I saw your MSN profile" then it would be a bit more believable to a person with such a profile, but less inclusive as a recipient with no such profile would immediately recognize the deceit.

The email included an MSN contact for chatting, so I fired up Live Messenger (MSN) to ask the sender, "Julie" why she was emailing my friend. I quickly discovered that Julie really likes silicon. No, I'm not talking about implants. . . I'm talking about computer chips. Julie is a chat bot, a computer program that responds when you instant message with her. Seriously.

The conversation started off innocuously enough. I said "Hi Julie" and "Julie" said "hi". I said "How are you" and Julie described her current state of libido! Quickly Julie wanted me to go to her website where I could chat with her and see her "show." I asked how much? (nothing is free, right?) I was told that I would have to prove my age with a credit card.

It is unclear if the goal is credit card fraud or simply selling nude web cam shows. I wasn't about to find out, but I assumed it was for fraud. I replied back "Ahhh, the old phishing scam! Thanks!" The response back was "Please don't mention anything about that in the chat room once u get in ok?" Somehow, I don't think I'm entering if it requires a credit card and a vow of silence about phishing.

The programming of this chat bot was sufficient to trick those with a bent toward purchasing such web cam shows. If you know these things exist then this one is easy enough to identify as being a program and not a person.

There are much more sophisticated chat bots. Some of them are even used for customer service applications and can be quite convincing. The moral of the story: when you get an instant message or a request to add an unknown person as a contact, be wary. You may not know who or what is on the other end without some context.

If you wish to submit questions or comments to "Ask the Expert" please feel free to send them to askeset@eset.com.



Randy Abrams is Director of Technical Education for ESET

AskESET@eset.com

www.eset.com

610 West Ash Street, Suite 1900

San Diego, CA 92101 • 866.496-ESET

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