Bastille
Wireless Threat Intelligence

Bastille Threat Research:

Bluetooth Vulnerabilities, Impacts and Mitigation Options for Your Organization

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Contents

Introduction

In two recent webinars, we discussed Bluetooth vulnerabilities that can expose a company's entire network to attack. In this paper, we discuss those vulnerabilities, the impacts they can have on a business, and some of the strategies network security professionals can use to mitigate the risks.

The Wireless Security Problem

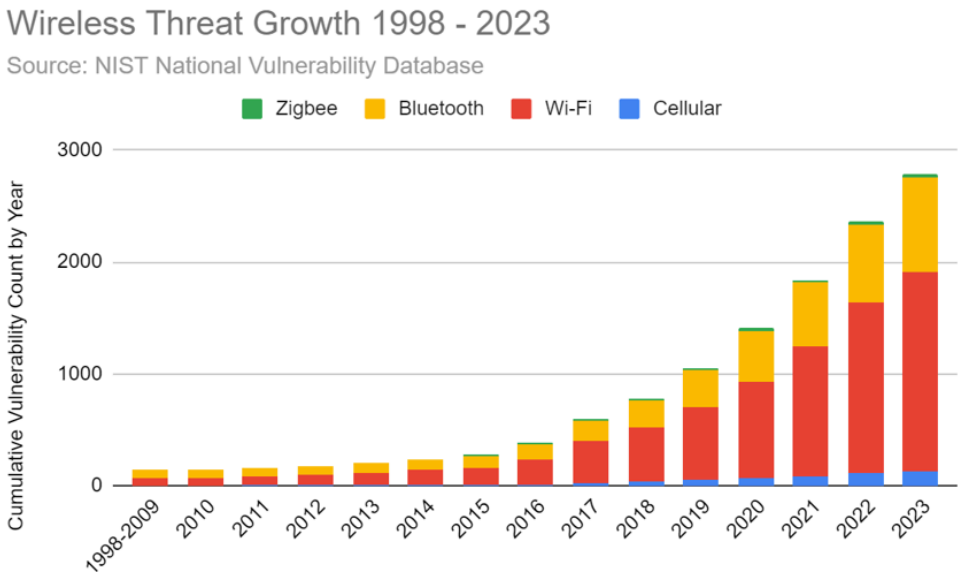
The pervasiveness of wireless technologies has fundamentally reshaped network security considerations. Legacy security models, often focused on well-defined network perimeters with wired and Wi-Fi endpoints, are no longer sufficient. The reality of today's network environment is far more complicated.

Bluetooth is an example that highlights the existence of a broader attack surface beyond traditional servers and wired connections. In the webinars, we set out the reasons why an understanding of the entire network, including potentially unmapped and unsecured Bluetooth devices, is important for security.

These unaccounted-for devices, whether mobile, corporate-owned, or personal, introduce vulnerabilities to the devices they are connected to and the networks those devices connect to. They act as potential entry points for attacks and exfiltration channels for sensitive data. The concerning trend of exponentially growing wireless protocol vulnerabilities, illustrated in the chart below, further emphasizes the urgency of addressing this expanding threat landscape.

The RF Cyber Threat Is Growing Fast!

~3,000 CVEs for Wireless Vulnerabilities



How Bluetooth Works

Bluetooth technology is now part of our everyday lives, allowing devices like phones, laptops, and keyboards to connect and share data via electromagnetic waves that travel at the speed of light, penetrate walls and ignore guards, guns and badge readers. While offering convenience with its two flavors – Bluetooth Classic and Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) – it also harbors significant security concerns.

To connect, Bluetooth Classic uses a method called "inquiry mode" which results in a lot of packet transmission to enable device discovery. Bluetooth Low Energy (LE), a newer version of the technology, uses dedicated advertising channels that streamline the discovery process.

Bluetooth's Achilles' heel lies in its variable security posture for connecting. In its weakest scenario, used by about 60% of apps, protocols like "JustWorks" offer connection with no authentication; and although encryption is possible, many apps don't implement it, leaving data vulnerable. Other forms of pairing two devices require some form of user interaction via passkey entry or numeric comparison to generate a shared key, but these can be compromised by weak key generation techniques in the Legacy methods. Secure Connections, a more recent and robust approach to key generation, requires compatible devices but the standard is not always enforced, especially in older devices.

The reliance on radio waves for data transmission introduces another layer of risk. Frequent channel hopping mitigates interference from other devices, but it doesn't eliminate the possibility of interception altogether. While we traditionally think of Bluetooth as a short-range connection, requiring connected devices to be close to one another, researchers have demonstrated that the range can be extended to over a mile in certain situations through the use of directional antennas, signal amplifiers, and/or Coded PHY (a BLE mode enabling longer ranges).

Why Bluetooth is Vulnerable

The ease of use and potential extended range of Bluetooth, coupled with its inconsistent security measures, creates a breeding ground for attacks.

Factors that make Bluetooth vulnerable to attack include:

- **Intricate and Evolving Specification:** The Bluetooth specification is currently over 3,000 pages long and constantly changing, making it challenging to maintain strong security across all implementations. The addition of new features and functionalities compounds this complexity.

- **Flat Network Architecture:** Bluetooth utilizes a decentralized network structure, lacking a central authority to enforce security protocols. Individual devices negotiate security settings, increasing the use of weaker configurations.
- **Prioritization of Power Efficiency:** Designed for low-power operation, Bluetooth prioritizes affordability and low power consumption over robust security measures.
- **Limited User Visibility and Control:** Users lack clear information about the security settings employed during Bluetooth connections and have no control over the mechanisms used.
- **Backward Compatibility:** A core principle of Bluetooth is its emphasis on compatibility with older devices. This can force newer devices to downgrade their security measures to connect with legacy systems, compromising overall security for the network.

Summary of Bluetooth Threats

Combining the factors set out in the introduction creates a security landscape where Bluetooth connections are susceptible to various attacks. We categorize the attack types into eight groups:

Name	Description	Impact	Mitigation
Monitoring	Using “sniffers” to eavesdrop	• Compromised Device Identity and Capability • Data Exposure • Device Tracking	• Disable Bluetooth • Use Secure Connections • User Caution • Awareness and Wireless Monitoring
Denial of Service (DoS)	Disrupt or disable a device or network by overwhelming it with unwanted traffic or raw RF energy	• Loss of Service • Critical Infrastructure Risks • Prelude to Other Attacks	• Disable Bluetooth • Keep Software Updated • Awareness and Wireless Monitoring
Session Hijacking	Disrupt or exploit a connection to impersonate one of the devices	• Data compromise • Data corruption • Physical system failure	• Enforce SCO • Authentication and encryption • Restrict access to GATT server • Awareness and Wireless Monitoring
Man in the Middle (MitM)	Attacker takes up a position between two devices trying to communicate	• Data compromise • System behavior manipulation • Physical security breaches	• Enforce secure attribute permissions • Utilize strong authentication mechanisms • Maintain software updates • Awareness and Wireless Monitoring

Name	Description	Impact	Mitigation
Keystroke Injection	Inject unauthorized keystrokes into the system	• Remote code execution • System compromise • Data compromise • Backdoor installation	• Update your systems • Consider replacing keyboards older than 2-3 years • Monitor for odd pairing processes
Pairing Attacks	Exploit vulnerabilities in the pairing protocol	• Authentication and encryption bypass • Data compromise • Data corruption • Physical system failure	• Enforce SCO • Monitor activity for unusual pairing attempts • Disallow legacy pairing
Paired Attacks	Exploit weaknesses in the connection between previously paired devices	• Compromise of sensitive data • Network intrusion • Data corruption	• Disable CTKD • Enforce Secure Connections • Enforce GATT server authentication • Wireless monitoring
Implementation Flaws	Errors or weaknesses in how Bluetooth technology is integrated into specific devices or software	• Data breaches • Data corruption • DoS attacks • Compromising other protocols	• Update devices whenever possible • Monitor activity • Enforce GATT server authentication on repairing • Enforce SCO for your most sensitive devices

Specific Threat Types and Mitigations

1. Monitoring

Monitoring refers to eavesdropping on Bluetooth transmissions using a "sniffer." Sniffers can be passive, simply listening to traffic, or active, requesting additional information from devices. Typically, this affects Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) rather than Bluetooth Classic, at least for now.
Bluetooth sniffers, like BtleJack, enable sniffers to crack the code on Bluetooth's frequency hopping scheme, allowing for monitoring of network traffic. Tools also exist to crack keys intended to preserve privacy of identity, enabling them to track devices even with privacy features like rotating addresses.

Impacts of Monitoring

The impact of Bluetooth monitoring can be significant:

- **Compromised Device Identity and Capability:** By analyzing transmissions, attackers can identify specific devices and their functionalities, allowing them to tailor their attacks and exploit known weaknesses in those particular devices.
- **Data Exposure:** Unencrypted data packets are vulnerable to interception, potentially revealing sensitive information. Weak encryption, especially in older Bluetooth versions, is also easily cracked.
- **Device Tracking:** Although Bluetooth versions after 4.0 introduce privacy features, it's still possible to track devices by analyzing behavioral information and metadata.

Mitigating Monitoring Threats

Monitoring threats exploit the common prioritization of convenience over security. As with most mitigations for Bluetooth vulnerabilities, the lion's share of the responsibility for securing connections falls on developers. Some ways to mitigate the risks of Bluetooth monitoring:

- **Disable Bluetooth When Not in Use:** This offers the strongest security but eliminates Bluetooth functionality. It's a trade-off, but a clear one.
- **Secure Connections:** Developers should prioritize secure, encrypted, and authenticated connections, especially for devices handling sensitive information or critical infrastructure. Data on devices with read-write privileges should only be accessible after passing rigorous authentication and encryption checks.
- **User Caution:** Users often have little control over Bluetooth device security settings, so the best advice is to be mindful that unknown or untrusted devices can be potential points of compromise.
- **Awareness and Monitoring:** While passive monitoring (a rogue device simply listening) often remains undetectable to network security, excessive inquiry or scan request packets could indicate someone actively requesting unauthorized data.

2. Denial-of-Service (DoS) Attacks

A Denial-of-Service (DoS) attack aims to disrupt or disable a device or network by overwhelming it with unwanted traffic or requests, making legitimate communication impossible. Bluetooth connections for everything from consumer electronics to industrial control systems are susceptible to DoS attacks, causing significant inconvenience and potentially opening the door to more severe security breaches.

Types of DoS Attacks:
Some common types of DoS attacks include:

- **BLE Spam Attacks:** These attacks exploit vulnerabilities in Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) specifications when hackers unleash a torrent of malicious notifications, causing devices to crash or become unresponsive. A recent example involved the use of a $70 custom device at DEF CON. The tool allows the user to bombard nearby iPhones with proximity alerts, soliciting user input such as requests for passwords. Other attacks involve other attack devices and target operating systems including Windows, macOS, Linux, etc. The most nefarious form of the attack resulted in iPhones being frozen for several minutes before being forced to reboot after which they immediately locked up again.
- **Bluetooth Jamming:** In this kind of DoS attack, the attacker overwhelms the signal and flips enough bits that the cyclic redundancy check (CRC) fails, and the recipient device drops the packet. This can prevent devices from finding each other or disrupt ongoing connections. The attacker can target entire frequency bands (like the advertising channels for BLE), specific packet types, or specific connections and networks by following their frequency hopping sequence. Even more worrying - researchers have demonstrated that jamming attacks can be launched from tens or hundreds of meters away.

Impacts of DoS Attacks:
Typical impacts include:

- **Loss of Service:** DoS renders Bluetooth functionality unusable, throwing a wrench into daily operations by disrupting communication, data transfer, and application usage.
- **Critical Infrastructure Risks:** DoS attacks can be catastrophic for systems relying on Bluetooth connectivity, such as critical infrastructure control systems.
- **Prelude to Other Attacks:** DoS attacks can be the first step in more serious cyberattacks. While the DoS attack disrupts communication, attackers exploit the process of devices rejoining networks to launch attacks to hijack networks or position themselves as a machine-in-the-middle (MitM).

Mitigating DoS Risks

- **Disable Bluetooth When Not in Use:** This is a simple, if drastic, way to prevent DoS attacks exploiting vulnerabilities in active connections.
- **Keep Software Updated:** Regularly installing firmware and software patches can help to avoid known vulnerabilities, some of which may be exploited during DoS attacks.
- **Monitoring:** Network monitoring tools can help detect DoS attacks by identifying suspicious traffic patterns or recurring corrupted data packets. Early detection allows companies to locate bad actors and deploy mitigation measures more quickly to reduce the risk of service disruption.

3. Session Hijacking

Session hijacking refers to an attacker taking advantage of a weakness in an ongoing communication session between two Bluetooth devices. This might involve stealing session keys or exploiting vulnerabilities in the pairing process. Imagine two devices are already connected and exchanging data. The attacker disrupts or exploits this connection to impersonate one of the devices and start communicating directly with the other. The unauthorized intruder can now manipulate the data flow, potentially eavesdropping on sensitive information or even issuing fraudulent commands.

Typical session hijack methods include:

- **Jamming:** The attacker floods the connection with irrelevant signals, preventing the central device from properly receiving and decoding packets from a peripheral. Eventually, the central device times out, dropping the network connection. Once the connection drops, the attacker quickly poses as the central device and resumes communication with the peripheral. Tools like BtleJack are designed to do exactly this by jamming part of the communication and jumping in when one of the devices drops.

- **Window Widening:** This kind of attack relies on the fact that central and peripheral devices use clocks that might not be perfectly synchronized. During a Bluetooth connection, a designated "anchor point" marks the start of communication. To account for potential clock drift, a calculated delay precedes data transmission from the central device. This ensures the peripheral doesn't miss the central device’s transmission when it starts sending data. An attacker can transmit data just after the anchor point, jumping in before the legitimate central device starts to transmit, tricking the peripheral into accepting the attacker's data instead.

- **BLUFFS (Bluetooth Low Energy Forward and Future Secrecy) Attacks:** These recently discovered vulnerabilities allow attackers to manipulate the pairing process. A random session key diversifier normally creates a strong, unpredictable session key. BLUFFS forces the use of a fixed diversifier, weakening the key significantly. This weakness allows attackers to crack the key offline, potentially granting access to data, enabling them to tamper with data transmission or even impersonate a legitimate device.

Impacts of Session Hijacking

A successful session hijack can have severe consequences:

- **Data Compromise:** The attacker can access sensitive data being exchanged between the devices, including personal information, financial details, or confidential messages.
- **Data Corruption:** The attacker isn't just a passive observer but can alter or tamper with the data stream, leading to malfunctions or manipulation of connected systems.
- **Physical System Failure:** In scenarios where Bluetooth controls a physical system (e.g., a smart lock), compromising the connection opens the door (literally!) for the attacker to gain control and cause physical damage.

Mitigating Session Hijacking Risks

Again, the key is to prioritize security over convenience, especially when critical systems are involved. Mitigation steps include:

- **Authentication and Encryption:** Strong authentication and encryption shouldn't be optional – developers should make them mandatory for connection (e.g. SCO) and/or ability to read from or write to device data (e.g. GATT).
- **Enforce Secure Connections:** Developers can build in a "secure connections only" (SCO) mode by default. This blocks pairing with devices that lack robust security features, eliminating weak links in the communication chain.
- **Restrict access to your Generic Attribute Profile (GATT) server:** Bluetooth devices utilize a Generic Attribute Profile (GATT) server to store and access data. Tighten security by making this server accessible only to paired devices that have undergone rigorous authentication and encryption.
- **Monitoring and Detection:** Session hijacks tend to generate a lot of communication traffic, making them possible to detect using wireless monitoring systems. Analyzing this chatter can identify specific patterns associated with known attack vectors. The system can also pinpoint suspicious activity using location data. For instance, a sudden jump in a device's apparent location during communication or multiple devices appearing to originate from the same address could be signs of spoofing or jamming attempts used in session hijacking.

4. Machine-in-the-Middle (MitM) Attacks

A machine-in-the-middle (MitM) attack occurs when an attacker takes up a position between two devices trying to communicate. Once in the middle, the attacker has significant control over the communication and can intercept data packets, relay them, play them back later, block legitimate traffic, or even tamper with the information itself. Tools like GATTacker and BTLEjuice are specifically designed for such manipulation within the Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) protocol.

BLE proximity relay attacks demonstrate the MitM threat. This method targets electronic locks in buildings or cars, for example, and exploits the communication between the lock and the authorized device (usually a phone). Using a device to bridge the connection between the lock and the phone, the attacker can relay signals back and forth. Since the attacker is close enough to the lock to fulfill any proximity requirements, it unlocks, believing it's communicating with the authorized device.

Impacts of MitM Attacks

Common impacts include:

- **Data Compromise:** Attackers can steal sensitive information transmitted over the Bluetooth connection, such as login credentials, financial data, or personal messages.
- **System Behavior Manipulation:** Malicious actors can modify the data packets exchanged between devices, causing unexpected behavior or even system failure. This can be particularly dangerous for devices controlling critical infrastructure or security systems.
- **Physical Security Breaches:** MitM attacks can bypass security mechanisms and unlock doors, disarm alarms, or gain unauthorized access to physical systems controlled via Bluetooth.

Mitigating MitM Attacks

While eliminating the risk is challenging, several strategies can significantly reduce the risk of MitM attacks:

- **Enforce Secure Attribute Permissions:** By restricting access to specific data attributes on the GATT server through authentication and encryption requirements, you can limit the attacker's ability to exploit vulnerabilities even if they achieve a MitM position.
- **Utilize Strong Authentication Mechanisms:** Always choose the most secure pairing method available when connecting Bluetooth devices. Methods like SCO offer more robust authentication than legacy pairing mechanisms with limited entropy. Never authenticate a link that mixes Passkey Entry and Numeric Comparison.
- **Monitor for Suspicious Activity:** Analyzing network traffic for anomalies like duplicate packets originating from different locations can help identify potential MitM attacks in progress.
- **Maintain Software Updates:** Updating Bluetooth firmware on your devices ensures they possess the latest security patches and address known vulnerabilities that attackers might exploit.

5. Keystroke Injection

Keystroke injection attacks exploit a computer's vulnerability to treat a malicious device as a legitimate human interface device (HID). This allows attackers to inject unauthorized keystrokes into the system and potentially steal data, install malware, or take complete control of the device.

Some examples of keystroke injection attacks include:

- **BLE Stack Flaw**: One specific keystroke injection attack targeted a Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) stack implementation flaw on Windows machines. The attacker exploits a window in the pairing process before encryption is established in which the host machine accepts unencrypted keystrokes. It does this by mimicking a previously connected keyboard and sending data before sending an encryption response message. As many as 13,000 keystrokes were accepted in the 30-second window before the host closed the session.
- **Bluetooth Classic Vulnerability**: This recently discovered set of attacks exploits a fundamental flaw in Bluetooth Classic that allowed any device disguised as a Human Interface Device (HID) to connect to a host machine (Windows, Android, Linux, MacOS, etc) without authentication and transmit unencrypted keystrokes.

The specific attacks described above have been patched. However, new methods are always being discovered. Considering the impact of such attacks, these are often patched quickly, highlighting the importance of updating devices to address security vulnerabilities and protect against such threats.

Impact of Keystroke Injection

Keystroke injection attacks are particularly dangerous because they grant the attacker complete control over the victim's device, allowing them to perform a wide range of malicious actions, including:

- **Remote code execution**: Attackers can inject and execute malicious code on the target device.
- **System compromise**: The entire system can be compromised, allowing attackers to install malware or disrupt critical operations.
- **Data compromise:** Attackers can steal sensitive information like login credentials, financial data, or personal documents.
- **Backdoor installation:** A backdoor can be installed to provide persistent access to the system for future attacks.

Mitigating Keystroke Injection Attacks

- **Update your systems:** This is the most important mitigation, as it ensures you have the latest security patches that address known vulnerabilities.
- **Consider replacing keyboards older than 2-3 years:** Old keyboards often can't be updated while newer models have the latest security features integrated, making them more resistant to these attacks.
- **Monitor for odd pairing processes:** Look for unusual pairing activity, such as a known keyboard or computer suddenly shifting position and appearing far from its original position. This could indicate that a compromised device is being used for malicious purposes.

6. Pairing Attacks

Pairing attacks exploit vulnerabilities in the pairing protocol to gain unauthorized access to a device or bypass encryption altogether.

Common Pairing Attacks:

- **Offline brute-force legacy pairing:** Legacy pairing methods like JustWorks use a fixed passkey (zero) to generate a long term key (LTK) used for encryption. An attacker can easily eavesdrop on the pairing process to capture the generation of the LTK and decrypt communication. Similarly, pairing methods that rely on user-entered PINs or low-entropy keys are vulnerable to brute-force attacks where attackers crack the key by trying many combinations.
- **Fixed coordinate invalid curve:** This exploits a vulnerability in Elliptic Curve Cryptography (ECC) used during Bluetooth pairing to generate a secure key. An attacker manipulates the key exchange by injecting an invalid point that actually falls outside the expected elliptic curve. This forces the devices to choose a weak key from a limited set of options and significantly reduces the key's entropy. With a weak key, the attacker can crack the key and eavesdrop on the communication, compromising the entire secure connection.
- **Key negotiation of Bluetooth (KNOB):** By design, Bluetooth devices can negotiate the strength of the encryption key used during pairing. This feature is intended to accommodate low-powered devices that might be unable to handle complex encryption. An attacker exploits the KNOB weakness to downgrade the key entropy to its minimum value, which is just 7 bytes per the specification. This significantly weakens the encryption and makes it much easier for the attacker to crack the key using brute force.

- **Pairing method confusion:** Attackers position themselves between two pairing devices and negotiate different pairing methods with each device. They use passkey entry on one device, where a displayed number is manually entered on the other device. On the other device, they use numeric comparison, where both devices display a code that should be the same.
  By manipulating the displayed code on the passkey entry device to match the code generated for "numeric comparison," the attacker tricks the user into believing they're authenticating a legitimate connection. Instead, it grants the attacker authenticated access to both devices, bypassing some Bluetooth security measures designed to prevent MitM attacks.
- **Passkey Reuse:** If users repeatedly use the same PIN or passkey for pairing, attackers can eavesdrop on the pairing process during the commitment phase, where devices share bits of the passkey one at a time to verify they match. The attacker disrupts the connection before it's complete, tricking the user into retrying with the same passkey. The attacker then replays the captured bits, making the device believe the attacker knows the correct code so that it grants access.
- **BlueMirror:** The attacker here acts as a middleman, relaying communication between two Bluetooth devices without decrypting the data. While attackers cannot see the content, they can disrupt the connection or exploit the authenticated position for further attacks. A variation on this attack forces the initiating device to use a pairing method that reveals the passkey during the process. By capturing this passkey, the attacker can then impersonate the legitimate initiator and establish a secure connection with the intended responder.

Impacts of Pairing Attacks:

- **Authentication and encryption bypass:** Successful pairing attacks grant attackers access to information on the compromised device, potentially exposing sensitive data.
- **Data Compromise:** Once attackers gain access, they can steal anything from login credentials and financial information to personal records, leaving you vulnerable to identity theft and financial loss.
- **Data Corruption:** Attackers might not just steal data but also corrupt or modify it, rendering it unusable or causing malfunctions.
- **Physical system failure:** The stakes are especially high for critical infrastructure controlled by Bluetooth. In these scenarios, compromised connections could allow attackers to tamper with data, potentially causing physical system failures with serious consequences.

Mitigations for pairing attack risks

Use of the following will fortify your Bluetooth security and minimize pairing attack risks:

- **Prioritize Secure Connections Only (SCO) Mode:** This enforces the strongest encryption and disallows legacy pairing methods, significantly reducing vulnerability. However, be aware that SCO mode can limit compatibility with older devices.
- **Disallow Legacy Pairing:** Legacy methods often lack robust security features, making them prime targets for attackers. By eliminating them, you raise the bar significantly for attackers.
- **Monitor Bluetooth Activity:** Pay attention to unusual pairing attempts, such as mismatched pairing methods in a single connection, especially if location data reveals a geographically distant device trying to connect.

7. Paired Attacks

Paired attacks exploit weaknesses in the connection between previously paired devices. Two examples Paired Attacks are:

- **BLURtooth - Cross-Transport Key Derivation (CTKD) Attack:** This attack leverages a feature that allows devices to use a single key for both Bluetooth Classic and Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) connections. An attacker can exploit this by negotiating a weak key on one protocol and overwriting the stronger key on the other. This essentially replaces the legitimate connection with a connection to the attacker. Newer Bluetooth specifications allow developers to prevent this key overwriting, but implementation is not guaranteed.
- **BLE Spoofing Attack (BLESA):** In this scenario, the attacker impersonates a legitimate GATT server during the reconnection process of previously paired devices. The attacker then sends false data to the client device. This data could be anything – misleading instructions, corrupted information, or even malicious code. Bluetooth specifications allow authentication for data exchange to be optional, so if the attacker's spoofed server fails an initial authentication attempt, some vulnerable client devices will keep accepting the false data anyway.

Impacts of Paired Attacks

- **Compromise of sensitive data:** CTKD and BLESA attacks aim to gain unauthorized access to data which should be protected, including sensitive information, personal details, or control commands for connected devices.
- **Network Intrusion:** By establishing a seemingly legitimate connection, attackers can gain a foothold within a network, allowing them to launch further attacks on other devices or systems connected to the network.
- **Data Corruption:** Attackers can manipulate or modify the data they intercept, potentially disrupting functionalities or causing malfunctions in connected devices.

Mitigation for Paired Attack Risks:

- **Disable CTKD:** Disabling the Cross-Transport Key Derivation feature eliminates the vulnerability to CTKD attacks.
- **Enforce Secure Connections:** Take advantage of the option within Bluetooth specifications (version 5.1 onwards) that prevents weaker authentication methods from overriding stronger keys. Utilize the most secure pairing mode available (Mode 1 Level 4) whenever possible. This significantly reduces the risk of successful paired attacks by relying on robust encryption methods.
- **Force GATT Server Authentication:** During the pairing process, ensure authentication of the server device to avoid connecting to spoofed servers in BLESA attacks.
- **Device Monitoring:** By identifying specific signatures in the wireless traffic, you can potentially detect ongoing attacks and locate the spoofing device.

8. Implementation Flaws

Implementation flaws are errors or weaknesses in how the Bluetooth protocol is integrated into specific devices or software. These flaws can arise from various factors, including:

- **Misinterpretations of the Bluetooth specifications:** Even though the Bluetooth standard defines how devices should communicate, manufacturers might implement it incorrectly, creating vulnerabilities.
- **Coding errors:** Bugs or mistakes in the code written to manage Bluetooth connections can introduce security holes.
- **Oversights during development:** Security considerations might not be prioritized during development, leading to weaknesses.

Examples of Implementation Flaw Attacks:

- **Downgrade attacks:** A malicious device might force a secure connection to downgrade its security settings, allowing easier interception of data.
- **Co-located apps attacks:** Co-located attacks exploit a weakness in Bluetooth permissions. A legitimate app establishes a secure, authenticated connection with a device. Another app running on the same device can then leverage the connection created by the first app because the OS doesn't distinguish between different apps for Bluetooth access.
- **BlueDoor:** Exploiting four critical vulnerabilities—the ability to spoof real device addresses, a lack of strict encryption enforcement by central devices, the exploitation of weak security profiles, and the ability of some devices to decouple authentication from encryption— enables attackers to gain access to data marked with "encrypted and authenticated" permissions.
- **BLEEDINGBIT:** This attack targets a specific BLE stack flaw present in a series of TI chips used by major companies like Cisco, Meraki, and Aruba in their enterprise-grade access points. These vulnerabilities allow attackers to corrupt the chip's memory using specially crafted BLE advertising packets. The beauty (for attackers) and horror (for security) is that this bypasses the need for device pairing. Attackers don't need to connect—they can exploit the flaw without attacking authentication or encryption.

  Once the attacker gains a foothold, they can create a backdoor within the BLE chip itself. This backdoor allows them to gain access to the entire Wi-Fi network served by the compromised access point - this is a higher risk in situations where BLE chips are integrated along other CPUs. A second vulnerability enables over-the-air firmware upload and installation without mandatory encryption, allowing attackers to upload malicious code.

- **Sweyntooth and Braktooth vulnerabilities:** Seventeen different vulnerabilities allow attackers to remotely exploit Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) and thirteen additional vulnerabilities affect Bluetooth Classic devices. Sweyntooth and Braktooth allow attackers to crash Bluetooth devices, trigger DoS attacks, and even bypass security measures – all without needing to pair or authenticate.
- **BlueBorne:** This critical flaw allows attackers to remotely execute code on Bluetooth Classic devices.
- **Bleeding Tooth:** The attack leverages weaknesses in the BlueZ stack, the standard Bluetooth protocol implementation for Linux. By sending malicious advertising packets, attackers can inject their own code into the system. Everything happens invisibly in the background, potentially leaving the system compromised without the user ever knowing.

Impacts of Implementation Flaws

These flaws can have a range of negative consequences, such as:

- **Data breaches:** Attackers might exploit vulnerabilities to steal sensitive information like login credentials, financial data or personal messages.
- **Data corruption:** Malicious actors can bypass security to manipulate data being sent or received via Bluetooth, potentially corrupting files and disrupting operations.
- **Denial-of-Service (DoS) attacks:** Hackers could exploit flaws to crash Bluetooth devices or render them unusable.
- **Compromising other protocols:** In multi-protocol devices (like smartphones with both Bluetooth and Wi-Fi), a Bluetooth flaw could be used as a stepping stone to attack other protocols on the same device. A vulnerability in one system can create a pathway for attackers to infiltrate other areas, potentially compromising your entire device's security.

Mitigations for implementation flaws

While some implementation flaws might be unpatchable, there are some steps to mitigate risks:

- **Update devices whenever possible:** Installing security patches is crucial to address known vulnerabilities.
- **Monitor Bluetooth activity:** Security monitoring tools can detect suspicious Bluetooth activity that indicate the presence of implementation flaws and identify potential attacks.
- **Prioritize strong connections:** Whenever possible, use robust security features; enforce SCO mode on highly sensitive devices, and enforce GATT server authentication when devices re-pair.
- **Be mindful of app permissions:** Be cautious about the permissions you grant to apps. Think twice before granting Bluetooth access to an app unless it's absolutely necessary for functionality. Limiting these permissions reduces the attack surface and makes it less likely that a compromised app can exploit Bluetooth vulnerabilities.

CONCLUSION

A Collaborative Effort for Bluetooth Security

The convenience of Bluetooth technology comes at a cost—inherent vulnerabilities that expose users to a range of cyberattacks. While prioritizing interoperability with older devices may seem tempting, robust security practices are paramount, especially for critical applications.

By working together, developers, users, and organizations can create a more secure Bluetooth environment, effectively mitigating risks and safeguarding against ever-evolving cyber threats. This collaborative effort is essential to ensure the continued growth and safe use of Bluetooth technology.

Key Takeaways

There are inherent challenges in using Bluetooth

- **Complex Standard:** Bluetooth's intricate specifications can introduce vulnerabilities due to the sheer number of moving parts.
- **Flat Architecture:** The lack of a central authority in Bluetooth networks makes it harder to enforce security measures and coordinate responses to threats.
- **Low-Power Devices:** The focus on low power consumption in Bluetooth devices often comes at the expense of robust security features.
- **Limited User Control:** Users generally have less visibility and control over Bluetooth connections compared to Wi-Fi, making it harder to detect and prevent attacks.
- **Backward Compatibility:** Bluetooth prioritizes maintaining connections with older devices, which can perpetuate security flaws present in outdated implementations.
- **Lagging Behind Wi-Fi:** Bluetooth security is not as mature as Wi-Fi security, leaving it more susceptible to exploitation.

It's a Wild West of Threats

- **Diverse Arsenal:** Attackers have a wide range of tools, code sets, and techniques at their disposal to exploit Bluetooth vulnerabilities. These threats can compromise devices in a multitude of ways and lead to:
    - Stolen or corrupted data
    - Devices that stop working
    - Overwhelmed and compromised systems
    - Unauthorized access to sensitive data and networks with potential catastrophic real-world effects

Historic Threats are as Real as Current Ones

- **Timeless Threats:** Many Bluetooth devices, especially older models, lack the ability to receive security patches and connect using the lowest possible levels of security, leaving them permanently vulnerable. Historical Bluetooth vulnerabilities remain just as dangerous as newer ones, creating ongoing security concerns.

Mitigation is possible

- **Software and Firmware Updates:** Keeping software updated on devices that are able to receive patches is crucial. This ensures they have the latest security fixes to address known vulnerabilities.
- **Strong Connection Modes:** Using features like Secure Connections Only (SCO) mode on sensitive devices or enforcing GATT server authentication during re-pairing make it harder for attackers to exploit vulnerabilities.
- **Limited App Permissions:** Granting Bluetooth access only to apps that absolutely need it reduces the attack surface.
- **User Awareness and Education:** Understanding the inherent limitations of Bluetooth security and the diverse threats can lead to better practices like avoiding suspicious Bluetooth connections, not pairing with unknown devices, and being mindful of the data transmitted over Bluetooth.
- **Monitoring Tools:** Security monitoring tools can help detect suspicious Bluetooth activity, allowing you to take action and potentially prevent an attack.

About Bastille

Bastille specializes in providing security solutions for wireless environments. Bastille uses a network of Software-Defined Radios (SDRs) to continuously monitor a facility's entire wireless environment, including cellular, Bluetooth Classic, Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE), Wi-Fi, Zigbee, and other protocols. Our sensors detect, analyze, and localize transmissions in real time, providing a comprehensive view of wireless activity.

Bastille's system goes beyond just identifying signals; it analyzes data to uncover real-time and long-term threats. By capturing the entire wireless spectrum, Bastille offers unparalleled visibility into potential security risks, empowering organizations to proactively safeguard their wireless infrastructure.

To learn more please visit https://www.bastille.net or follow us on LinkedIn.