

Combating Cross-Site Scripting Assaults without Proprietary Software

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Abstract

Exploiting the security vulnerabilities in web browsers, web applications and firewalls is a principal characteristic of cross-site scripting (XSS) assaults. Dominate part of web population with essential web attentiveness are vulnerable and even expert web users may not see the assault to have the capacity to react so as to neutralize the ill effects of assault . Because of their unpretentious nature, an exploited server, a compromised browser, a impersonated email or a hacked web application tends to keep this type of assaults alive even in the present circumstances. XSS assaults extremely counterbalance the advantages offered by Web based administrations along these lines affecting the worldwide web group. This paper concentrates on guard, recognition and prevention components to be adopted at a variety of different network doorways to defuse cross-site scripting assaults using non Proprietary Software.

Keywords: XSS, Web Application Firewall, Web Server Log Files, ModSecurity.

INTRODUCTION

Exploiting the security vulnerabilities in internet browsers, web packages and firewalls is the key feature of cross-site scripting assaults. Regularly, inexperienced or unsuspecting users fall prey to these kinds of attacks and even specialists might not be aware the attack so that it will reply in time to neutralize the unwell consequences of assault. Intolerable code can be injected into web pages that may exchange the conduct of the web pages, thief user statistics, and carry out illegal moves the use of false impersonation or cause method instability [8] which effects the web sites. Attacker website sends a script to a victim that steals data from the device

Cross-site scripting vulnerabilities permits the attacker to insert malicious code into customer browser and execute inside the content of the modern-day software[16]. When the victim visits the attackers web site may get hold of the

malicious code and if the victim clicks the link and the script may run on the victim server and send the valuable information to the attacker. Attacker may additionally send the e-mail containing a link to the victim , if the victim clicks the hyperlink that directs the user to attacker managed web page and attacker injects script to borrow cookies which are used for session hijacking[7]. The effect of injected XSS script includes.

- Drives traffic to another site by injecting a link or image.
- Records each keystrokes on the victim machine.
- Steal cookies
- Calls a malicious URL for drive by downloading.
- Exploits browser vulnerabilities.
- Modify the content of the web page(inserting words or images and bad reputation)
- Accessing the local file system.

RELATED WORK

Kerschbaum, F.[12] implemented a solution that prevents reflected cross-site scripting using a gateway at the server

M.I.P. Salas and E. Martins [16] anticipated Penetration Testing and Fault Injection to emulate XSS attack against Web Services.

Engin Kirdaa,, Nenad Jovanovic, Christopher Kruegel and Giovanni Vigna [3] used Noxes Web application firewall to protect XSS attacks.

Isatou Hydera , Abu Bakar Md. Sultan, Hazura Zulzalil and Novia Admodisastro [6] done literature review on various journals related to XSS attacks and found that there is no single solution to mitigate XSS attack

Jayamsakthi Shanmugam and Dr. M. Ponnaivaikko[7] surveyed vulnerabilities with current solutions based on client or server side location, analysis type and intrusion detection type and also focused on strengths and weakness of all approaches.

Mike Ter Louw and V.N. Venkatakrishnan [15] implemented design that turned into integrated with numerous famous web programs. The DESIGN changed into evaluated towards a barrage of stress assessments that exhibit strong resistance to assaults, excellent compatibility with net browsers and reasonable performance overheads.

INJECTING MALICIOUS CODE METHODS

Reflected XSS(Non-persistent XSS)

Malicious script does not store in the server. The server bounces the original input from the server to the user[19]. The user inputs are reflected back to the browser. The malicious code is inserted into the data stream but not stored.

Example for Non-Persistent XSS

Table 1 : student.php script

```
<?php
$name = $_GET['name'];
echo "Student Name : $name ...<br>";

echo"<a href='http://yourchoice.com/student.php?name='
. $name . '> Select the page</a>";

?>
```

When the user clicks on the link, victim system may connect to the malicious site where the malicious code will be executed at the client machine. The damage may be caused at the victimized system which cannot be traced by any of the tools since the victim has deliberately initiated the execution of the malicious code.

Stored XSS (persistent XSS)

A persistent attack where the data is permanently located in a file system or database. The server stores the malicious code and this injected script will not be reflected back, permanently located in the file system or database.

Example for Persistent XSS

Most of the websites ask the users to post their feedback in the text box and this message will be stored in the database. If the hacker posts malicious code like tracking session ID cookie and if server fails in validating the input provided by the hacker. Any user having cookies appraisal this message and his account is compromised.

Table 2: PHP code for stealing cookie

```
<SCRIPT>
document.location=
'http://hackerhost/cgi-
bin/cookiesteal.cgi?'+document.cookie
</SCRIPT>
```

DOCUMENT OBJECT MODEL

This attack appears in Document Object Model. DOM based attack will happen when the Javascript in the page accesses a URL parameter and uses this information to write HTML to the page[3]. It has been observed that more than 50% of the web sites are vulnerable to DOM based XSS attack.

CROSS SITE SCRIPTING DEFENSE

Security in general can never be fool proof, there is always vulnerability. There is no guarantee that the system won't be attacked. Today there is a need to intercept all type of communication including SSL traffic (HTTPS). It is necessary to check if the system is under attack. System may be under attack, if the huge number of request coming from internet for a particular web service.

- Defense mechanism at Client side
 - Disable Java Script: Client browsers can be configured to modify their security decisions based on properties of the script such as its origin, execution period, frequency of interacting with client etc.
 - Verify email: Email attachments or links sent via emails are the most prevalent mechanism for the spread of XSS. It is imperative that before a user clicks on an attachment / link in an email, the user is completely sure that the sender's credentials are correct and that the message itself is authentic.
 - Always update: Browser, Operating System, Antivirus and relevant software have to be kept up to date in order to be able to detect ever

growing threats. These software are themselves under constant improvement therefore enhancing the risk of exposing newer vulnerabilities

- Defense mechanism at Server side
 - Input validation (Black listing VS White listing): With the expanse of web applications, customizing access policies are necessity on a per-case basis at application level. Rules can be framed to allow particular forms of requests, originating from specific clients etc (White listing) or disallowing particular type of requests, originating from specific clients etc (Black listing).
 - Encode all meta characters send to the client: To avoid being victimized by XSS attacks such as Non-persistent (Reflective) XSS, all outgoing data can be encoded using html meta characters which offers a certain degree of defense against this type of attacks.
 - keep track of user sessions: XSS attacks frequently attempt to hijack user sessions. As user session management is the responsibility of the web server, the rules and protocols to be used, their validity periods etc. can be strengthened to check XSS attacks.
 - Web application firewall: Tailor made rule sets for individual web applications are the best mechanisms to defend web applications from XSS attacks to cope up with the increasing range of web applications and the scope of web services being offered by them.
 - Always test: As newer web applications are developed, proper and thorough testing against all known and possible types of XSS vulnerabilities is the best practice to insulate a web application from all three forms of XSS attacks.

DETECTION

XSS attacks are detected at application layer, because web applications run at this layer. This paper lays emphasis on detecting XSS attacks in the following locations of the network.

- Web Application Firewall
- Web Server Log Files

DETECTION AT WEB APPLICATION FIREWALL

Typical firewalls examine traffic based on protocols like TCP, UDP and ICMP, because they operate at network layer and transport layer[9]. TCP/IP was not initially proposed to be utilized for business and person to person communication applications and administrations. Responsibility was not a noteworthy concern and secrecy became de facto identity for Internet and its applications such as WWW. As the number and scope of applications of the Internet grew, it became evident that normal firewall security is inadequate. It is important to secure individual web applications from vulnerabilities existing in TCP/IP. Web application server traffic can be controlled by defining rules for decision making applying specific filters. Since this firewall operates at the web application server level, it is the best place for detecting XSS attacks.

DETECTION AT WEB SERVER LOG FILES

Web Servers store a lot of information regarding incoming requests and outgoing responses in the form of web server logs. The log data contains user activities and confidential information about the user[4]. However, even the web server logs tend to omit certain critical pieces of information such as data sent to HTTP header and also due to the volume of data being served by the web server; the logs can contain information about only a partial set of outgoing web traffic.

Specific details of problems pertaining to the website can emerge by probing key areas in the server logs. Following are the information for extracting information from the log files.

- Most and least traffic on the web pages.
- Pages viewed by the visitor
- Details of the visitor(domain name and request of the visitor)
- Request's date and time.
- Method invoked, URL requested and number of bytes transferred.

ALGORITHM TO ANALYZE WEBSERVER LOG FILES

For each request do

If visitor's domain name is in black_listed_domains_list then

Send alert to server administrator

Exit

End if

Identify the number of hits on each web page

If number of hits on a particular web page exceeds the

specified limit then

Identify visitor's location (IP Address, Domain name)

Add visitor to black_listed_domains_list

Send alert to server administrator

Exit

End if

Identify the total bytes transferred for particular IP.

If total no of bytes exceeds maximum limit then

Add IP Address to black_listed_domains_list

Send alert to server administrator

End if

End

PREVENTION

Older browsers had little or no vulnerabilities as their function was limited to make http request, receive html response and render the output for the user's view. As WWW became more popular, the functionality of web browsers also enhanced. Programmability of web browsers and extensibility is a common feature of all modern browsers. This exposes the browsers to hackers who tend to exploit this feature as vulnerability[17]. It is very complex to mitigate XSS attacks such as persistent XSS due to this very vulnerability. Poor programming in developing web sites also helps the attacker to exploit their malicious scripts and inject code into the user's browser[13]. There is a need to use filtering mechanism at different networking devices in the network. This paper focus on two methods for preventing the XSS attacks.

- Web Application Firewall
- Code Filtering

Web Application Firewall

Web Application Firewall rules are defined based on the security policies to identify and block malicious code. It examines the payload to detect malicious traffic in addition to examining IP address, Protocol and port number. Incoming user data via post, get and cookie values are disinfected. Requests to URLs not defined in filtering rule sets are disallowed.

Web application firewall is one method to prevent the attack; we must have a clear understanding of the operation of the web application and the services offered by it and configure the firewall carefully. Firewall filters HTTP traffic based on the rules defined[2]. Web application firewall operates at the application layer, identifies and blocks XSS attacks. The blocking rule is placed in the firewall configuration file.

Implementing the web application firewall rules helps to

- Block malicious and inappropriate traffic.
- Examines all inbound and outbound traffic for malicious Redirect URLs and Malicious JS Payloads.
- Stop the IP address of the user that tries to attack the website.
- Expert tuning and configuration management
- Ongoing performance and availability management
- Checks outgoing HTTP responses and verify that it stops the attack

Mod Security

ModSecurity is an web application firewall (WAF) module which is an open source and cross-platform. It filters incoming and outgoing data to stop malicious traffic and also analyze and detect malicious traffic. All the details of the malicious traffic are recorded in the log file and alert messages are sent to the administrator. It defines rules on HTTP data such rules will have access to full HTTP header information[1].

Operating as an Apache Web server module, the purpose of ModSecurity is to increase web application security, protecting web applications from known and unknown attacks.

Modsecurity prevents attacks by monitoring HTTP traffic based on rules define in configuration file. If the modsecurity is not configured properly it cannot detect the attacks. The detection of attacks are mainly based on the configuration.

Steps involved in Configuring the Web Application Firewall

Set the mod_security module, logging functions, cookie parser version and folder for persistent storage.

Set SecFilterScanPost ON for retrieve request payload

Verify the encoding of URL request by setting SecFilterCheckURLEncoding ON

Set the SecAuditEngine ON to log all HTTP requests.

Set the location of the log file with SecAuditLog /log/mod.log

Allows scanning of POST request with SecFilterScanPOST

Reject all invalid requests with status 403 by setting SecFilterDefaultAction "deny,log,status:403".

Disallows directory traversal with SecFilter "\.\/"

Deny all request containing /bin/bash string with SecFilter /bin/bash

Algorithm for blocking Cross-Site Scripting assaults using modsecurity firewall

The modsecurity webserver firewall examines REQUEST_HEADER:Referer, REQUEST_URI and REQUEST_METHOD

```

for each request do
    if (REQUEST_HEADER:Referer contains
        blacklisteddomainname) then
        Block the request.
        Store the requester_info in the log file.
    endif
    if(REQUEST_URI contains "script"|"alert"|script
        methods) then
        Block the request.
        Send the alert message to the administrator.
    end if
    If(REQUEST_METHOD does not match the pattern
        "\^(GET|HEAD)$") then
        Block the values of the web page
        Restricts request method to either GET or HEAD
        Send alert to administrator
    Endif
End
    
```

Code Filtering

The Cross-site scripting vulnerability occurs due to unseemly refining of user inputs[6]. To prevent XSS attacks always validate input fields. The input filtering should uncover Cross-site scripting vulnerabilities in web applications[14]. There are functions like htmlspecialchars() and strip_tags() in PHP to block XSS attacks.

There are two approaches to filter XSS attacks that are input and output filtering. The main data like URL, HTTP referrer objects, GET and POST parameters from a form, Window.location, document.referrer, document.location must be properly filtered before being used on websites because users' data without proper validation leads to XSS attack[18]. The input filtering ensures proper web application behaviour[20].

Algorithm for filtering from XSS attacks

```

for each request do
    if(request method is GET) then
        Examine the URL string for malformed
        characters.
        if(malformedcharacter are found) then
            reject the request
        endif
    endif
    if(request method is POST) then
        Examine the protocol in the request.
        if( request protocol is not secured) then
            block the request
        else
            Process the SSL.
        endif
        examine the URL string
        if(input parameter contains script methods)
            then
                reject the request
            endif
        endif
    endif
    if (input contains
        Window.location|Document.referrer|document.location) then
        Reject the Input
    endif
    if(input contains CookieName.getValue != "" ) then
        CookieName , setValue = "";
    Endif
    If(input contains Headerdata) then
        Block the header
    endif
end
    
```

Output Filtering

Output filtering is done at server side before sending to client browser which is similar to input filtering. There is a need to ensure that the special characters are not filtered at output filtering. The user data need to be filtered such as encoding the

characters before sending it back to the browser[10]. There are two ways to set encoding, response header and meta tags. Don't let the web browser guess at a web pages content encoding[15].

RISKS FROM XSS ATTACKS

According to a survey by Web Application Security Consortium, over sixty percent of websites are prone to XSS attacks. Only a keen and perceptive perspective can reveal a XSS attack victim[12]. The target machine(s) and the software is the major resource for computing system of attack[11]. Confirming round the clock continuous service to the clients becomes a top priority to the organization [5]. Hackers have been exploiting the cross site scripting vulnerability right from the development of scripting languages which aid in enhancing the web users' browsing experience.

Table 3 : Analysis from security firms on XSS

Security Firm	Analysis
Trust wave's Spiderlabs	Websites vulnerable to cross site scripting attacks > 80%
CWE by MITRE(Common Weakness Enumeration)	XSS is one of the most prevailing, fixed, and risky vulnerabilities found in websites.
WhiteHat Security	XSS notorious for being the most common vulnerability of websites

The vulnerabilities found in the application layer are XSS, Content Injection, Cross-Site Request Forgeries (CSRF), Session Management, Information Leakage, Authentication, SQL Injection and Other Injection. The vulnerabilities discovered by Edgescan[21] in 2014 for web application layer is shown in figure below.

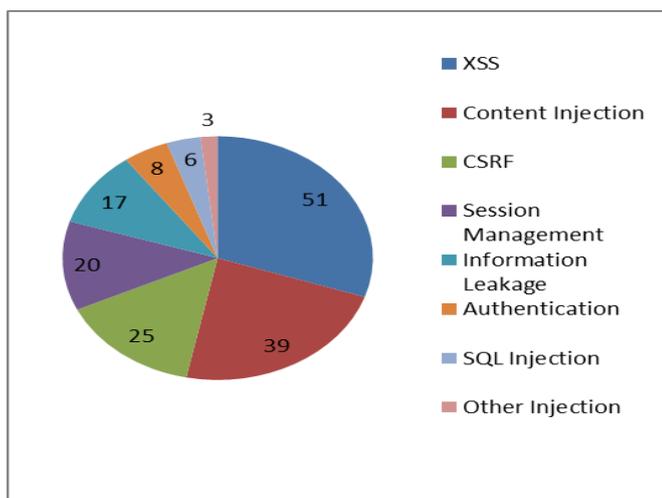


Figure 1: Vulnerabilities discovered in 2014 in web application layer

All public and private establishments regardless of the nature of their operations have taken to web enabled information technology platforms. IT services have become the de facto standard for employees and their employers to perform their regular functions. Social networking is set to revolutionize the way everybody interacts with everybody else. The way to conduct one's business is fast becoming online. XSS attack impact on various segments employing web enabled IT services is shown below.

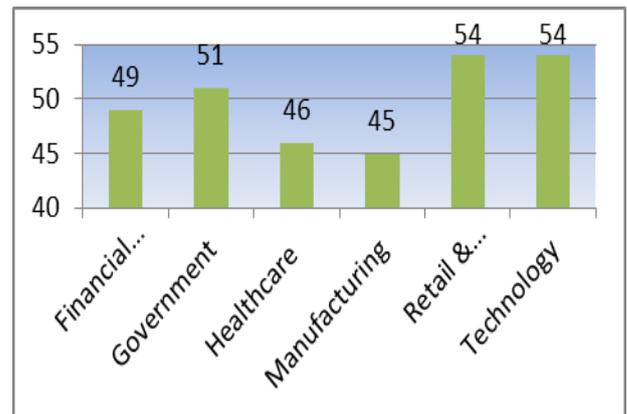


Figure 2: The impact of cross site scripting attacks on different organizations

Web applications security vulnerability depends both on the programming language chosen as well as the deployed platform. Any combination of the web technologies employed by the organizations is not completely immune to security threats. The major percentage of software platforms used in the Manufacturing, Healthcare, Government and Financial Services are .NET and Java. A segment wise view of the web technologies employed by these sectors is shown in the figure below.

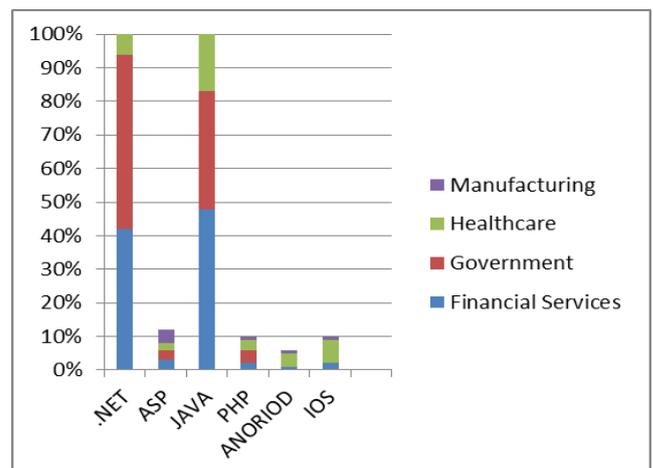


Figure 3: Percentage of the software used by different organization web sites

RESULTS

Cross-site scripting vulnerabilities are misused on the site. Cross-site scripting vulnerabilities empowers an assailant to target different clients of the application, conceivably accessing their information, performing unapproved activities for their benefit, or doing different assaults against them.

The script is injected into the name parameter, the browser will execute the script which generates the popup window as shown in the figure 4 below.

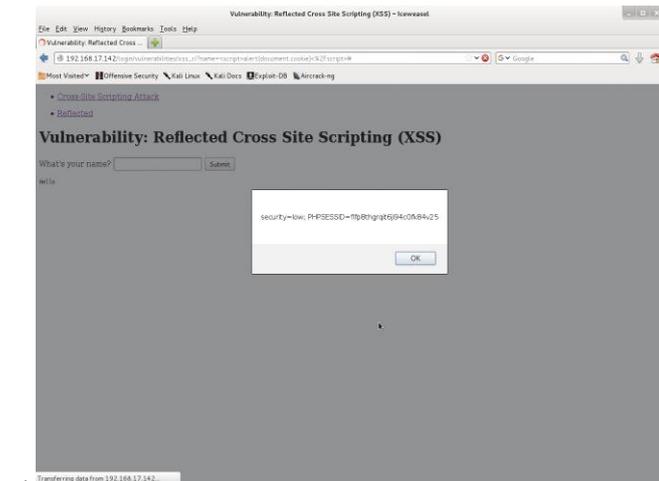


Figure 4: Execution of Reflective Cross site scripting attack

The attack can be captured by the wireshark as shown in figure 5 below. The packet no 73 shows that the malicious script is injected with the GET request. The packet no 75 shows that the request is accepted and runs the malicious script.

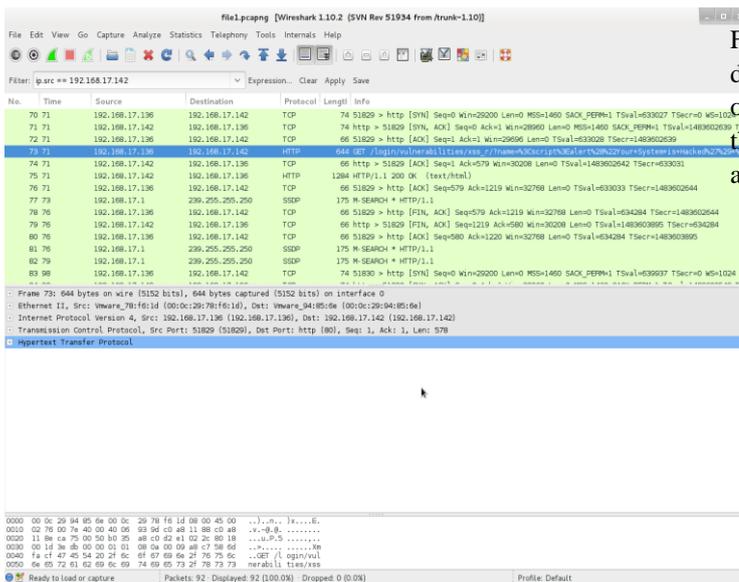


Figure 5: Reflective XSS attack is examined at the Packet No 73 & 75

After implementing the algorithm 6.1.3 on modsecurity web application firewall the following results are observed. The script is injected in the name parameter as shown in figure 6 below



Figure 6: Java Script is injected in the name parameter

Algorithm for blocking Cross-Site Scripting assaults using modsecurity web application firewall implemented in modsecurity web application firewall blocks the script running in the browser, the browser will execute "Forbidden" error code as shown in figure below.



Figure 7: Browser with the Cross-site scripting overcrowing rule

Figure 8 beneath indicates wireshark catch the assault. It demonstrates that the GET request was sent with the injection of cross site script in packet #4. Then, the packet #6 shows that the request is forbidden with help of the defence algorithm.

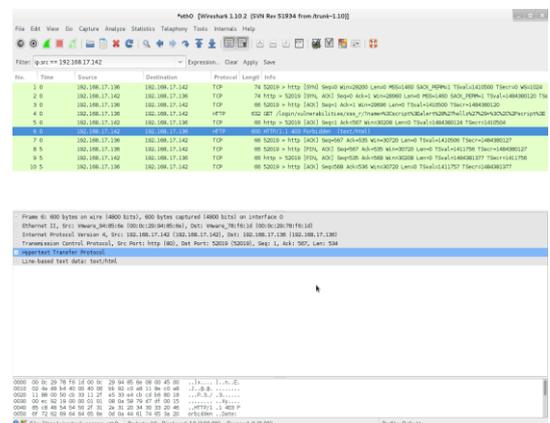


Figure 8: Blocking of Reflective XSS attack is examined at the Packet No 6

CONCLUSION

Web applications need to convey web administrations day and night to meet the regularly developing worldwide interest for online administrations over the Internet. XSS assaults utilize known vulnerabilities in existing Internet tools and advances to upset web administrations affecting their clients. All XSS assault strategies have been broke down. Hazard impact factors of XSS assaults on different public and private sectors have been assessed. This paper concentrates on distinguishing and counteracting XSS assaults utilizing web server log records, web application firewalls and code filtering

Defusing Cross-Site Scripting assaults is not a paltry assignment. Mechanism for mitigating the XSS assault has been monitored / identified at various areas, for example, web server log files, web application firewalls and web server requests/responses . Web Server log file has been utilized to distinguish the assault. ModSecurity web application firewall and code filtering has been utilized for both discovery and avoidance of assault.

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