



Issued 3/30/17

Millions of Stolen US University Email Credentials for Sale on the Dark Web

Stolen email addresses and passwords from the largest US universities are offered for sale on the Dark Web at anywhere from \$3.50 to \$10 apiece.

But that's only a snapshot of a lucrative underground market for pilfered – and even spoofed and phony - student, faculty, staff, and alumni email credentials, according to new research published today by the nonprofit Digital Citizens Alliance (DCA) that searched the Dark Web for credentials from the top 300 US universities.

With the help of research firm ID Agent, they found 13,930,176 credentials from those big schools, with the University of Michigan (122,556), Penn State (119,350), University of Minnesota (117,604), Michigan State (115,973), and Ohio State (114,032), with the most credentials for sale, and MIT with the biggest ratio of stolen and spoofed email addresses to number of enrolled and staff, 2.81:1, followed by Carnegie Mellon University, 2.4:1, Cornell University, 2.39:1, and others.

The massive increase likely has to do with third-party website breaches, where university users register with their .edu email addresses with social media, e-commerce, and other websites that suffered breaches, either

reported or unreported. "There have been significant third-party breaches in 2016," he notes. ID Agent has seen a 547% increase in all types of credentials (including universities') for sale in the Dark Web over the past three years. Think big breaches at Yahoo, DropBox, LinkedIn, and others.

The caveat, however, is that the researchers don't know how many of the stolen passwords are valid (they can't legally confirm that). Also, some of the emails are spoofed or phony, but DCA notes that doesn't mean they aren't a danger to a university: spoofed emails are often used in phishing attacks. Also, the report only looked at the largest US universities, so other high-profile but smaller-enrollment universities weren't included.

University email accounts are juicy targets for opportunistic cybercriminals: Some of these schools have thousands of people coming in every year with different levels of sophistication, and education about financial and medical records [for instance]" and may be using a credit card for the first time.