Using Cookies For Selective DoS and State Detection ha.ckers.org web application security lab

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Content

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Using Cookies For Selective DoS and State Detection

28 posts left....

This is a continuation of the first post where we described how you can use cookies to DoS certain portions of the website. After our speech one of the Mozilla guys came up to us and described another attack that arises from this. Let's say when a user logs in it sets a cookie that is 200 bytes long, and when they log out it re-sets the same cookie to 50 bytes. Well if the attacker can set a cookie with a particular path to a single image on the site, for instance, they can use JavaScript to check with an onerror event handler to see if the image has loaded.

By combining the over-long cookie (minus 50 bytes) a logged in state will cause the image to fail to load, where as a logged out state will allow the image to load just fine. In this way an attacker can tell cookie states as long as the cookies are variable width and there aren't other cookies muddying the waters. Interesting attack, I thought!

This entry was posted on Sunday, August 22nd, 2010 at 10:03 am and is filed under Webappsec. You can leave a response as well.

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Recovery notes

Source evidence recovered on 2026-09-14. The earlier source capture (SHA-256 `a7d7cde8fd01302cffe04613ed275de92799a196568bffc64fe24568cb9e8166`) is no longer available. This publication uses a separately preserved capture of the same document recorded on 2026-08-06 (SHA-256 `bffc8f8d05afca8978317339f8f2298dcf6dbd4b708a52ad1841bbe15afa8b59`). The retained article text was checked against this replacement capture. Complete retained variable-width-cookie state-detection explanation agrees, including200/50byte cookies, path-scoped oversized cookie and image onerror. Existing capture-quality limitations remain recorded separately. The missing earlier capture remains documented in the archive history.
