

How Cisco's newest security tool can detect malware in encrypted traffic

Cisco's Encrypted Traffic Analytics (ETA), which monitors network packet metadata to detect malicious traffic even if its encrypted, is now generally available.

By Brandon Butler

Senior Editor, Network World

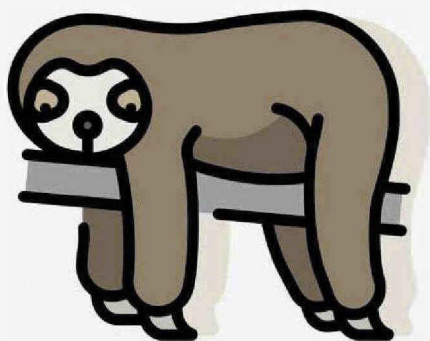
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Cisco's Encrypted Traffic Analytics (ETA), a software platform that monitors network packet metadata to detect malicious traffic, even if its encrypted, is now generally available.

The company initially launched ETA in June, 2017 during the launch of its intent-based network strategy and it's been in a private preview since then. Today Cisco rolled ETA out beyond just the enterprises switches it was originally designed for and made it available on current and previous generation data center network hardware too.

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there is smoke before you know there is fire.”

If potentially malicious traffic has been identified, information such as which host initiated the conversation and what information was exchanged are important to determine the scope of a problem, Harrell says. ☒

Why ETA could be a big deal

More and more traffic is encrypted. Cisco estimates 55% of traffic on the web is encrypted now, a figure that Gartner predicts will grow to 80% by 2019. Meanwhile, up to 41% of hackers use encryption to evade detection, Cisco says. ☒



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Organizations use a range of options for ensuring the security of encrypted traffic in their networks. Most of these approaches use next-generation firewalls, deep packet inspection (DPI) or Secure Socket Layer (SSL) inspection. Harrell says these tools require some sort of tradeoff though. SSL inspection, for example, intercepts and decrypts traffic to determine if it is malicious and only after it's confirmed to be safe will complete the connection. Malware can infect that SSL inspection, leaving it vulnerable. Harell argues that its inefficient to decrypt all traffic, then re-encrypt it before allowing users to access it. Cisco says it is the first company to have developed a way to monitor encrypted traffic for vulnerabilities.

IoT security

Harell says ETA could be important in the world of IoT, too. ETA's ability to monitor encrypted traffic's metadata means it could analyze all IoT traffic without necessarily needing to put security tools like firewalls on each of the small-form-factor IoT devices. ☒

Cisco says ETA has another benefit: cryptographic compliance. Some organizations are required to use certain levels of encryption for regulatory reasons. ETA, through its use of analysis metadata, can provide proof of certain levels and types of encryption being used.

How to buy ETA

ETA is generally available as of today and is available across data center, campus and branch office hardware, including the Catalyst 9000 switching line, as well as previous and current generation Integrated Services Router (ISR), as well as Aggregation Services Router (ASR) and the Cloud Services Router (CSR). ETA is included in purchases of these hardware devices along with a subscription to Cisco ONE software that includes Stealthwatch.

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