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The spies in your living room: 70% of smart appliances vulnerable to cyber-attack

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By [Graham Templeton](#) Jul. 30, 2014 12:52 pm

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Some months ago, the hacker/trolling group DerpTrolling [tweeted](#) that they were attacking Xbox Live with their botnet of refrigerators. Many took this to be a joke, since it sounds so ridiculous, and Derp certainly likes to play up the absurdity of the world that's available to the modern hacker. But make no mistake: Derp was not joking. When most of your attacks are based on sending one of the simplest possible communications — the simple requests that collectively make up a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack — you don't need a bleeding-edge Mac Pro to do it. Even a fridge, or a stove, and certainly a television, is powerful enough to be useful to hackers of all stripes, and new research shows that many of them are almost totally unprotected.



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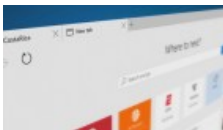
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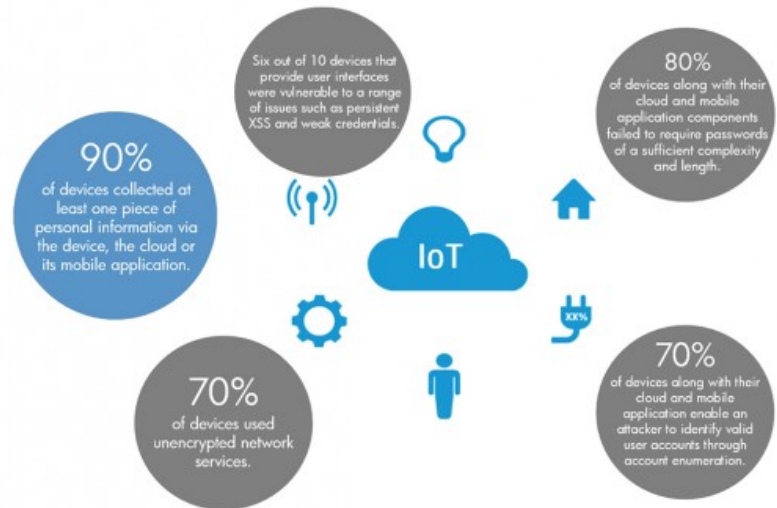


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The [study in question](#) [PDF] comes from the Hewlett Packard security arm Fortify on Demand, which did a security assessment on the so-called “Internet of Things.” As more and more devices hook into our networks, both wifi and social, more and more devices are going to start holding sensitive information about us. HP’s study found that 70% of smart appliances have serious security weaknesses, running the gamut from lack of encryption to insecure firmware to easily guessed passwords. This same study predicts that as many as *26 billion* such devices will be connected by the year 2020.



That might not be such a big deal if all these appliances could do is take down websites and screw with online gaming communities, but the vulnerabilities run much deeper than that. Amazingly, the HP study estimates that fully 90% of smart appliances collect at least one piece of personal information about the user via social media, the cloud, and its mobile applications. On average, the group found a whopping 25 vulnerabilities per device!

This isn’t Windows 8, folks — microwaves and stereo systems and such a limited need for communication and general mobile processing that there’s simply no reason for security holes. Something like Android or iOS, those are complex enough to make security holes forgivable. But there’s no reason for LG smart fridges to be vulnerable to simple software exploits — especially when gaining easy access to a fridge could be a foothold to accessing wider parts of a home network.

Some sort of standardized network security accreditation needs to arise to fix this problem. Many will balk at the idea of a government run security standards project — and with good reason — but if industry is going to continue to act so unconcerned about the agents they’re putting in our homes, then perhaps regulation is the only answer. Additionally, regulators need to consider the use

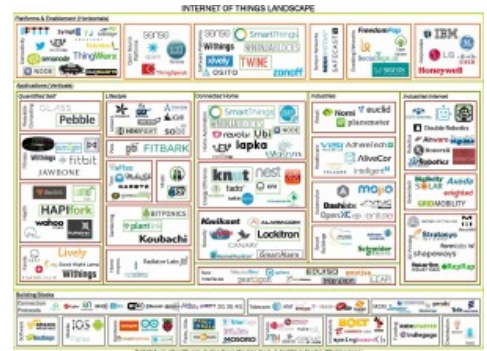
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of smart appliances in cyber-warfar between governments; how silly would the US feel if a domestic botnet of ovens and DVD players suddenly tied up government communication lines or something equally sinister?




A greatly simplified map of the Internet of Things landscape.

If nothing else, we can't continue to be told that the collection of information by the US government is critical to security, *and* that it's no big security concern if foreign governments acquire that very same information. Data-mining is a far-reaching practice these days, and the Internet of Things is making that easier than ever. As everything from garage doors to mattresses acquire the "smart" label, we need to make sure we don't end up looking like idiots.

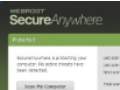
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