River City Media and the Data Leak

River City Media is an e-mail marketing firm that distributes over 1 billion messages a day to spam filters worldwide. Over the years River City Media obtained "'e-mail accounts, full names, IP addresses, and often physical addresses' from over a billion people through its spam operation that involves e-mail promising of 'credit checks, education opportunities, and sweepstakes.'"[1] River City Media successfully hid its data gathering and spamming operation from the public for years. One technique used by spammers to obtain such information is called co-registration, where you are asked to click on the "submit" or "I agree" button when using a website, but in the text next to the box is fine print wherein you have agreed that your personal details can be shared with affiliates of the site.

In January of 2017 Chris Vickery, a cybersecurity expert at MacKeeper, discovered unsecured data on over 1.3 billion users. After an investigation, and in collaboration with security organizations Spamhaus and CSO Online, Vickery traced the source of the leak of the unsecured data to a spamming operation at River City Media. The full report from CSO Online reveals that River City Media accidentally leaked this information via a failure to properly configure its backup system. This left an open repository of information for the cybersecurity researcher (Vickery) to detect. Through this security failure, unsecured data was left available for anyone who cared to collect it and use it.

Sources:

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[1] Chris Vickery, as cited in Jonathan Vanian, "Major Spammer Accidentally Leaks Data on a Billion People," *Fortune*, 03/06/2017. http://fortune.com/2017/03/06/spammer-leaks-data/ accessed on September 12, 2018.