

Dropbox opens files without users' permission – Encryption as effective protection

After it became public that Dropbox opens its users Word files without their knowledge, the cloud storage provider is again heavily criticized by cloud users and privacy advocates. To protect data privacy, cloud storage users should therefore encrypt all files before the upload.

Augsburg (Germany), 09/20/2013: Few days ago the security expert Daniel McCauley revealed that the cloud provider Dropbox opens .doc-files after the upload without the user's permission. These news caused a big stir, not only amongst Dropbox users.

Dropbox itself commented on this disclosure and said that opening the files is necessary to enable their "preview"- feature. According to Dropbox, this is a backend process which opens documents to create a preview. In response to the public pressure, Dropbox recently modified this preview feature. Now external images are indeed no longer loaded, but to create a preview, it is still necessary to open the .doc-data.

In its terms of service, Dropbox keeps the right to create a preview of the files and thus to access the user's files. In addition, it's privacy policy states that an access is made if required by law: "We may disclose to parties outside Dropbox files stored in your Dropbox ... to comply with a law, regulation or compulsory legal request.... If we provide your Dropbox files to a law enforcement agency ..., we will remove Dropbox's encryption from the files before providing them to law enforcement."

Such news – as well as the current NSA affair, unsettle many cloud users. One way to protect files from unauthorized access e.g. by the provider is to use a secure encryption which encrypts the files locally on the user's device before uploading them to the cloud. Then the user can be sure that his files are protected. In Dropbox's privacy policy it continues: "However, Dropbox will not be able to decrypt any files that you encrypted prior to storing them on Dropbox."

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Secomba is a company located in Augsburg, Germany, founded in 2011 and dedicated to innovation in cloud data security. Its encryption software Boxcryptor (www.boxcryptor.com) is a user friendly software solution which guarantees, under the highest security standards, the encryption and security of files.