

Sony Breach Put Credit Card Data at Risk

By HIROKO TABUCHI

TOKYO — Sony acknowledged on Sunday that credit card information for 10 million PlayStation Network users could be at risk after a hacker attack that infiltrated the company's servers and resulted in a catastrophic system shutdown.

The company also said that it had been slow in alerting users of the network — which offers downloadable content for Sony's PlayStation game consoles — that their personal information

was vulnerable, and apologized for the security breach.

"I am deeply sorry for worrying, and inconveniencing, our users," Kazuo Hirai, Sony's executive deputy president, said at a press conference in Tokyo. He said he was not certain that personal credit card information had been acquired by a hacker, but could not rule out the possibility.

Sony's security debacle has dealt a serious blow to the company's bid to build an online network that brings games, music and video content to its universe of gadgets. Sony has trailed in building an online presence behind companies like Apple and its popular services, iTunes and the App Store.

The company has also faced questions about whether it moved quickly enough to inform its users of the breach. The PlayStation Network, which has about 77 million users, went down April 20, but Sony did not disclose that personal data had been stolen until a full week later.

A subcommittee of the House of Representatives has sent a letter to Sony asking for information about the attack. Among its questions are when the intrusion occurred, whether Sony knew who was responsible and when the company notified law enforcement agencies.

According to Mr. Hirai, an "unauthorized person" hacked into Sony servers last month and obtained personal information on PlayStation and Qriocity account holders, including their names, addresses, e-mail addresses and user names and passwords for the PlayStation Network.

The hacker attack focused on Sony servers on three days in mid-April, Mr. Hirai said. The company first became aware of the intrusion April 19 and shut down its servers the following day.

He said that other information, including credit card numbers for about 10 million users, might have been compromised, and warned customers to "remain vigilant" by monitoring for identity theft or financial losses.

There is no evidence that the credit card data has actually been accessed, Mr. Hirai said, adding that the company is working with the F.B.I. in the United

States and with law enforcement agencies in other countries investigating the attack.

Fielding questions at a hastily called press conference on Sunday afternoon, Mr. Hirai acknowledged that Sony had been slow in providing information on the network breach to its users. It took the company time to gather accurate data on the breach, he said.

"Inspecting and analyzing a vast amount of data unfortunately took a lot of time," he said. "We wanted to make sure that the information we provided was as accurate as possible."

Sony, based in Tokyo, said parts of the network would be back online this week but that a full return could take until the end of the month. The company also said it was readying a new

A setback for the PlayStation Network, an attempt to connect games and video.

data center, adding firewalls and appointing a chief information security officer to bolster protection of consumer data.

The PlayStation Store, where users buy games, movies and other downloadable content, will not be available until later this month, Sony said.

And the new Qriocity service, which streams audio and video content to Sony's high-end televisions, Blu-ray players and other Web-enabled devices, was also knocked offline in the attack.

Once the network is up and running again, users will have to change their passwords before they can connect. Sony will offer free content and other giveaways as part of an "appreciation program," the company said.

Despite the security breach, Mr. Hirai said that online networks would remain central to Sony's business.

"Sony continues to place utmost priority on its network strategy," he said. "We intend to continue our global expansion."