Nest Hub (Generation 2) ioXt Device Assessment

Google

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Executive Summary

Overview and Scope

NCC Group was contracted by Google to conduct a security assessment of the Nest Hub (Generation 2) device. This assessment was specifically focused on determining whether the device complies with The ioXt Security Pledge.[1] This assessment was performed in over a period in October 2020, with some follow-up testing in May 2021, and was authorized by Google.

The device being assessed is a smart speaker device with display. One "production" devices were purchased from the Google public storefront for the test. The firmware versions for the devices are:

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Software version: 35.27.30.366850516
Chromecast firmware version: 1.54.252731
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Key Findings

Within the test parameters, the security posture of the production device was found to be strong. After the re-testing, interfaces exposed on the development device were restricted or unavailable on production, all BLE and WLAN communication was secured using best-practices, namely up-to-date TLS, factory reset functionality removed user private data, and Google provided documentation regarding the security pertaining to firmware integrity assurances and the data storage protections used by the device.

With respect to the ioXt Smart Speaker Profile, the device met the minimum certification requirements, but some of the higher level requirements were not met, as further described in the following section.

Limitations

All assessments performed as part of the ioXt pledge certification program are intended to be time-limited black box audits. These reviews are simply focused on determining the basic security hygiene of the product and the compliance with the eight pledge principles. Therefore, NCC Group performed this shallow review in a limited time-frame, and did not explore deeply any portion of the device. For instance, NCC Group did not review the kernel, or look for remotely-exploitable memory corruption issues in network-listening services. This type of work is best suited for a white-box audit where product source code is available.

Additionally, a number of relevant services and applications were out of scope for the purposes of this assessment. In particular, NCC Group did not assess the back-end microservices or perform an assessment of the applications running on the device. The companion mobile application was also out of scope.

[1] https://www.ioxtalliance.org/the-pledge

ioXt Pledge Compliance Summary

This section serves to summarize the device's compliance with the ioXt Smart Speaker Profile[2] version 2.00, which has been defined by the ioXt Alliance.

Principle	Level	Justification
No universal passwords	2 / 2	While the device itself does not require authentication for a user to interact with it physically, Google account credentials are required to remotely interact with the device, and these credentials, along with WLAN connectivity, are required to render the device operable. Note also that Google account authentication can be backed by two-factor authentication. NCC Group determined the requirements associated with this pledge item to be met based on these details.
Secured interfaces	2 / 4	A remote port scan was performed. No ports were directly exposed remotely by design of the device. On WLAN several network ports are exposed, but Google provided information regarding the securing or limited functionality associated with each. NCC Group did not observe any unsecured interfaces that would provide a WLAN-attacker a foothold. Security levels 3 and 4 were determined to not be met. The microphone is not optically shielded (SI102), and therefore theoretically vulnerable to lightcommands attacks. Furthermore, although Amlogic has found and patched vulnerabilities related to power-glitching, no specific documentation could be found regarding this SoC's broad protection measures against power side-channel attacks (SI106), a requirement necessary for security level 4. It is important to note however that the device does meet most of the test cases required to meet security levels 3 and 4. Aside from those described above, physical interfaces were determined to be disabled (SI3.1). Data persisted to the flash filesystem, including device private keys, is secured by a hardware-backed trusted application and trusted execution environment (SI104). The microphone mute switch and LED indicator are implemented in hardware, protecting them from influence by misbehaving or compromised software (SI108).
Proven cryptography	2 / 2	Google provided a description of the cryptography used for software updates, hardware-backed data storage security, the security of all data transmitted and received, and device provisioning. NCC Group further reviewed the device private key metadata to confirm that they conformed to recognized standards.
Signed software updates	4 / 4	Google provided detail on the method by which software updates are received and verified, including detail pertaining the Secure Boot functionality of the bootloader running on the Amlogic SoC. The anti-rollback mechanism was also described as part of this. NCC Group was unable to intercept and modify an update due to the TLS-secured channel by which the device receives updates, but in review of the documentation and observation of the live update, NCC Group determined these requirements to be met.
Automatically applied updates	2 / 2	Google provided a security maintenance plan, indicated that updates were applied to connected devices regularly and automatically, notifying the end user. NCC Group observed one such update, and determined the associated test cases to be satisfied.

[2] https://www.ioxtalliance.org/s/ioXt_Smart_Speaker_Profile.pdf

Principle	Level	Justification
Vulnerability reporting program	4 / 4	Google described the vulnerability reporting program applicable to this and many other devices.[3] NCC Group has confirmed that this program meets the ioXt requirements, including ISO29147[4] compliance.
Security expiration date	1 / 1	Google shared internal documentation regarding the EOL support of various devices including this one, meeting the requirements of this pledge item. Google indicated that this information will be publicly available at https://support.google.com/product-documentation/answer/10231940 by July 30, 2021.
Security by default	2 / 2	The requirements in this pledge item pertain to the implementation of factory reset and voice recognition. Upon performing a factory reset, network and account credentials were removed from the device. Google further described this functionality in documentation. A subset of voice commands pertaining to users' private data such as calendar and contact information was found to be inaccessible by an unrecognized (computer-generated) voice.

[3] https://www.google.com/about/appsecurity/reward-program/
[4] https://www.iso.org/standard/72311.html

ioXt Security Pledge Methodology

This section describes the criteria used by NCC Group when testing a product for alignment with the ioXt Security Pledge. While many of the questions posed below are answered manually by reviewing and testing the product, in the interest of time, some may be answered based on the *ioXt Pledge Questionnaire* that the OEM fills out to provide NCC Group with a detailed technical understanding of the product and its security controls.

The set of tests that were explicitly performed are detailed in the member-accessible ioXt Test Case Library. This summary provides a broader perspective of the considerations that NCC Group reviewed in alignment with the overall ioXt pledge.

The ioXt Security Pledge is composed of eight clear principles:

1 No universal passwords

The pledge states:

> *The product shall not have a universal password; unique security credentials will be required for operation.*

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the device:

- All device passwords are unique at the earliest opportunity (out-of-box experience or manufacturing) and not reset-table to any universal default value.
- The minimum strength and verification method of the password render brute force attacks difficult even at scale.
- The device does not use any hard-coded credentials or identity.

With respect to any methods by which the device authenticates to remote endpoints and functionality, NCC Group further reviewed the following:

- Establish the set of identifiers that uniquely identify a device and consider the use and sensitivity of each.
- Establish that each device must prove its unique identity and authenticate to exercise any remote functionality using a proven secure mechanism.

2 Secured interfaces

The pledge states:

> *All product interfaces shall be appropriately secured by the manufacturer.*

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the device:

- JTAG/SWD and debug interfaces are disabled on release products.
- All sensitive interfaces, including device-internal interfaces, are encrypted and authenticated.
- Authorization is performed for any privileged access to device functionality.
- Sufficient input validation is performed on all external interfaces.

3 Proven cryptography

The pledge states:

> *Product security shall use strong, proven, updatable cryptography using open, peer-reviewed methods and algorithms.*

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the device:

- Establish where the product uses cryptography.
- Establish that wherever cryptography is used, it is considered standard and best-practice.
- Establish that wherever TLS is used, it is version 1.2 or greater.

4 Security by default

The pledge states:

Product security shall be appropriately enabled by default by the manufacturer.

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the device:

- There are no RMA/debug modes enabled in release firmware.
- There are appropriately implemented privacy modes/buttons.
- There is no means to trivially bypass user authentication.
- All device keys are managed securely.
- There are no unnecessary network-facing services, and those that are necessary restrict access accordingly.
- The manufacturer provides consumers with clear and transparent information about how their personal data is being used, by whom, and for what purposes, for each device and service. This also applies to third parties that can be involved, including advertisers.
- Where personal data is processed on the basis of consumers' consent, this consent is obtained in a valid way, and that consent is revocable by the consumers at any time, allowing the consumers to permanently delete all previously collected data and prevent future collection.
- Logging on the device does not expose personal private information of the user.

5 Signed software updates

The pledge states:

The product shall only support signed software updates.

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the device:

- Firmware updates are downloaded over TLS, and the certificate of the firmware host that the device verifies should be pinned.
- The firmware images are encrypted until installation.
- The firmware images are signed, and they are verified on the device prior to installation.
- The device supports secure boot.
- The device supports downgrade prevention.

6 Automatically applied updates

The pledge states:

The manufacturer shall act quickly to apply timely security updates.

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the manufacturer:

- The device supports a secure firmware over-the-air update mechanism.
- The manufacturer is able to distribute firmware updates remotely using this mechanism.
- The consumer can be informed in a timely manner that an update is required or available. The urgency of each update is communicated to the consumer.
- Where possible, the device will continue to provide a basic level of functionality during an update.
- The manufacturer maintains awareness of both internally developed and externally sourced firmware running on the device and is responsive in distributing updates to both in the presence of a discovered vulnerability.

7 Vulnerability reporting program

The pledge states:

The manufacturer shall implement a vulnerability reporting program, which will be addressed in a timely manner.

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group engaged the manufacturer to answer the following questions:

- Have you ever had to deal with an external security vulnerability report?

- Have you defined patching criteria which guarantee that vulnerabilities must be patched within a reasonable time frame from initial disclosure?
- When a security update is published, how are vulnerability details disclosed publicly to stakeholders including customers?

Furthermore, NCC Group has reviewed the following aspects of the manufacturer:

- Security contact information and vulnerability reporting guidelines are published on the manufacturer's website.
- The contact information is easily discoverable.
- Any documentation provided by the company related to the their vulnerability disclosure program and its parameters.
- The company participates in a bug bounty program, and the details thereof.

8 Security expiration date

The pledge states:

> *The manufacturer shall be transparent about the period of time that security updates will be provided.*

In order to test this best-practice, NCC Group engaged the manufacturer to answer the following questions:

- After the product is released, what is the earliest possible date that it will no longer be supported via security patches before *End Of Life*?
- How is this information communicated to stakeholders including customers?