Office365 Advanced Threat Protection – Safe Links

Scope: SO, CCC	Revision Date: 12/8/2016

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1. Introduction

Office365 ATP protects email sent to Faculty/Staff members that include URLs in the body of the email by rewriting the URL to protect the user from links to known malicious sites at the time they click the link. When the recipient clicks on a URL in an email, it is first scanned by Office365 to see if it is a known malicious site. If the URL is to downloadable content (i.e. a Word doc), the linked content is also scanned by Safe Attachments to check if the content is malware.
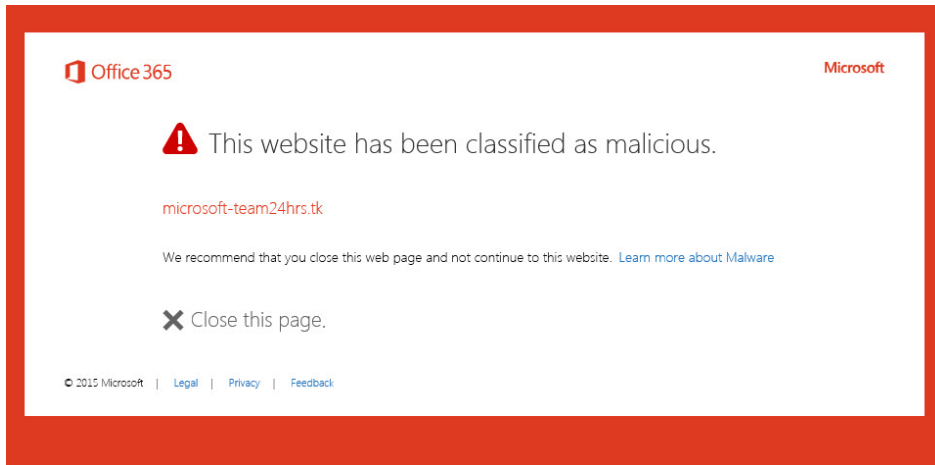
Just because the link is not a known malicious site, doesn't mean it's guaranteed to be safe, it just means it's currently not a known malicious site. You still need to be cautious when visiting a site from a link received in an email.

2. Scope

System Office and CCC Faculty and Staff Office365 email accounts

3. How does Safe Links Work?

When an email is sent to you that includes a URL (a link), the URL is rewritten so that Office365 can check the link against a list of known malicious websites at the time you click the link. If it is found to be a known malicious site, you will be redirected to a block page:

If the page is not a known malicious site, you will continue to the original link.

Depending on how the sender sent the link, you may see the rewritten links only if you hover over the link showing the full, rewritten link. Notice that the link you would click on now includes "safelinks.protection.outlook.com" indicating it will be first scanned by Office365 when the link is clicked:
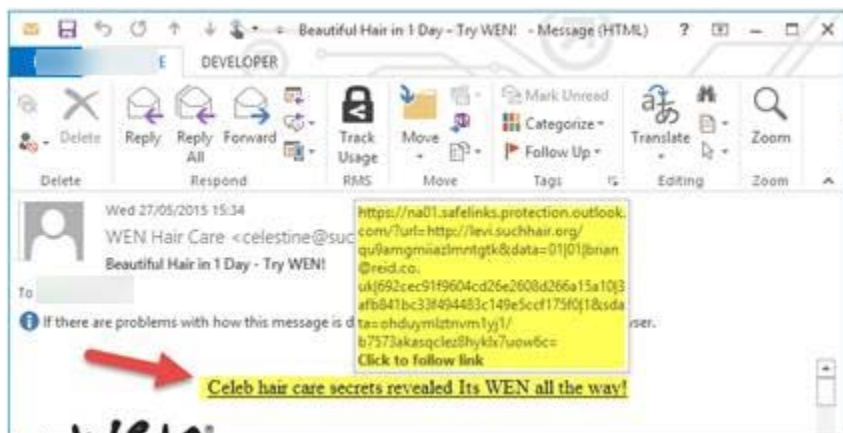
If the sender sent you just a link in the body of the email, you would see the rewritten link right in the body of the email. Notice that you can see the original link buried in the rewritten link:

SafeLinks also protects you from receiving a link to malicious downloadable content (i.e. a Word doc). A site itself might not be a known malicious site, but the content you are downloading might be malware. Therefore, URLs to downloadable content is additionally scanned by SafeAttachments.

The email that contains the link will be delivered immediately. The Safe Attachments scan of the linked content will take on average several minutes to complete. During this time, if you click on the link, you will be taken to a scan result pending page until the scan of the linked content is complete. This is to protect you from visiting a link that downloads malware (i.e. an infected Word doc).

After the linked content is scanned and is found to be benign, the link will immediately redirect to the linked content. If it is malicious, the user will be blocked after clicking the link.

Answers to common questions on SafeLinks can be found in our Office365 Email FAQ:
https://supportcenter.ct.edu/service/Office365_emailFAQ.asp

If you have any questions concerning SafeLinks after reading the FAQ items, please contact your local IT department.