

# Webcam Interception and Protection in Kernel Mode in Windows

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Frameworks

Attack  
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Protection Driver  
Development

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- Founded in 2012 by Andrew Newman, a leading security expert.
- Focused on privacy protection.
- Products:
  - Reason Antivirus (formerly known as Reason Core Security)
  - Should I Remove It?
  - Unchecky
- The Reason Antivirus engine scans over 1B files in 180 countries a day.

The logo for Reason Cybersecurity is displayed on the right side of the slide. It features the word "Reason" in a white, sans-serif font, with a teal-colored circle around the letter "o". Below "Reason" is the word "Cybersecurity" in a larger, bold, white, sans-serif font. The background of the right side of the slide is dark blue with a pattern of binary code (0s and 1s) and a large, light blue circular arc on the left edge.

# Outline

- The importance of webcam security
- Multimedia frameworks
  - DShow Bridge
  - Frame Server
- Attack strategies
- Protection driver development
- Existing protection solutions

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# The Importance of Webcam Security

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# The Importance of Webcam Security



## Global Surveillance

NSA, Hacking Team, etc.



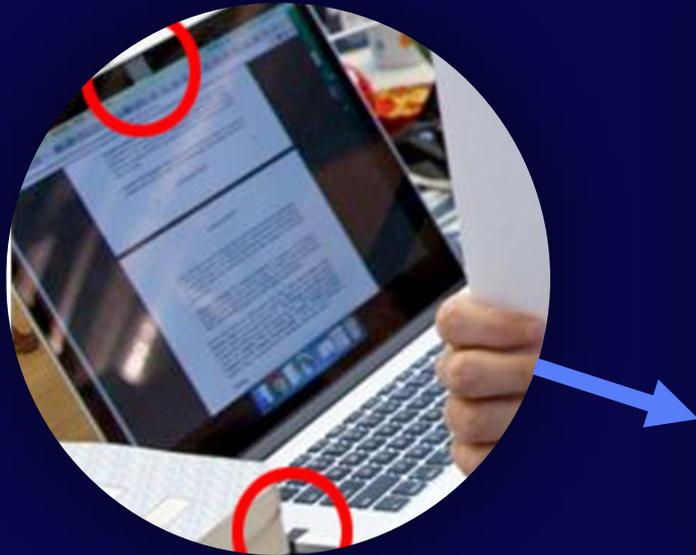
## Stalkerware

e.g. FlexiSPY



## Webcam Ransom

# The Importance of Webcam Security



# The Importance of Webcam Security

“Since being founded in 2003, the Italian spyware vendor Hacking Team gained notoriety for selling surveillance tools to governments and their agencies across the world. [...] The capabilities of its flagship product, the Remote Control System (RCS), include [...] remotely activating a device’s webcam and microphone.”

[Filip Kafka, WeLiveSecurity \(ESET\)](#)

“Mark Zuckerberg masks Mac webcam and microphone [...] FBI director James Comey has previously said he also covers his laptop's webcam to prevent hackers spying on him.”

[Kim Zetter, WIRED](#)

“According to The Intercept, the NSA uses a plug-in called GUMFISH to take over cameras on infected machines and snap photos.”

[BBC News](#)

# Multimedia Frameworks

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# Multimedia Frameworks



1992

VfW

Obsolete



1996

DirectShow



2006

Media Foundation





## VfW (Video for Windows)

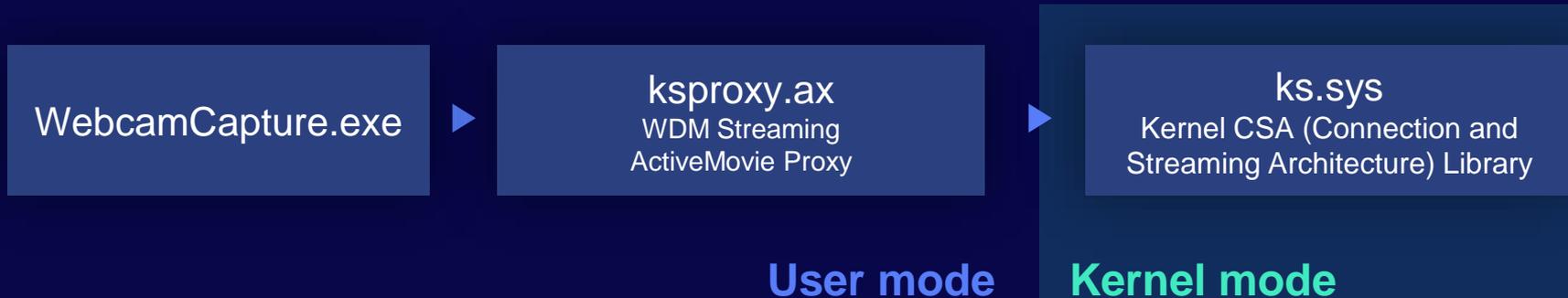
- A multimedia framework that enables applications to process video data.
- First introduced in 1992. Became an integral component of Windows 95 and later.
- Replaced by DirectShow in 1996.
- Nowadays implemented by the VFVWDM32 driver as a backward compatibility layer.



# Direct Show



- An architecture for streaming media based on the Component Object Model (COM).
- Announced in 1996, originally named ActiveMovie.
- Became a standard component of all Windows operating systems starting with Windows 98.
- Probably the most popular API for interacting with the camera on Windows today.





# Media Foundation

- A multimedia platform based on the Component Object Model (COM), intended to replace DirectShow (but apparently is not there yet).
- Introduced in Windows Vista (2006), enhanced in Windows 7 and further enhanced in Windows 8.
- *“Media Foundation has a couple features that DirectShow did not. The playback experience should be better (fewer glitches), and it also has much more robust support for content protection systems.”*

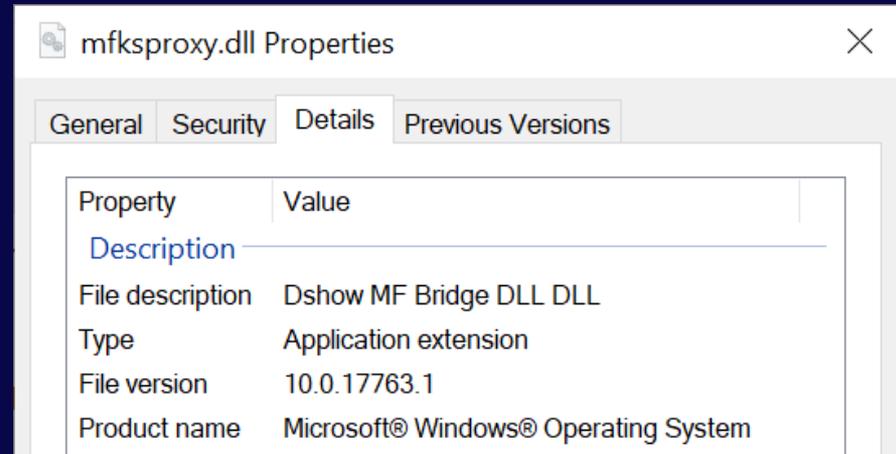
Becky Weiss, Microsoft

# Media Foundation



# DShow Bridge

- A proxy to allow applications designed for DirectShow to use Media Foundation.
- Introduced in Windows 10 Anniversary Update (Version 1607, August 2016).
- Implemented in mfksproxy.dll.



# DShow Bridge

Enabled if:

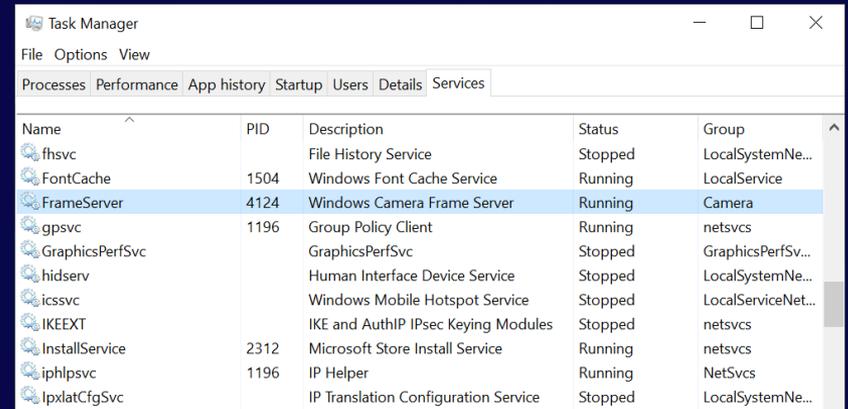
- DShow Bridge is enabled for the camera device.
  - HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Enum\USB\  
<DeviceVID&PID>\<DeviceInstance>\Device Parameters
  - Enabled if the **EnableDshowRedirection** DWORD value has the 0x00000001 bit set.
- Capturing application is not blacklisted from using DShow Bridge:
  - HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\OEM\DshowBridge\<number>
  - HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\WOW6432Node\Microsoft\OEM\DshowBridge\<number>
  - There's an existing entry for "Launcher\_Main.exe" from Logitech in the above branches.

# Frame Server

- Introduced in Windows 10 Anniversary Update together with DShow Bridge.
- A service virtualizing a camera device, allowing the device to be shared between multiple applications.
- In practice, camera device sharing is reserved for the system.

*“It was important for us to enable concurrent camera access, so Windows Hello, Microsoft Hololens and other products and features could reliably assume that the camera would be available at any given time”*

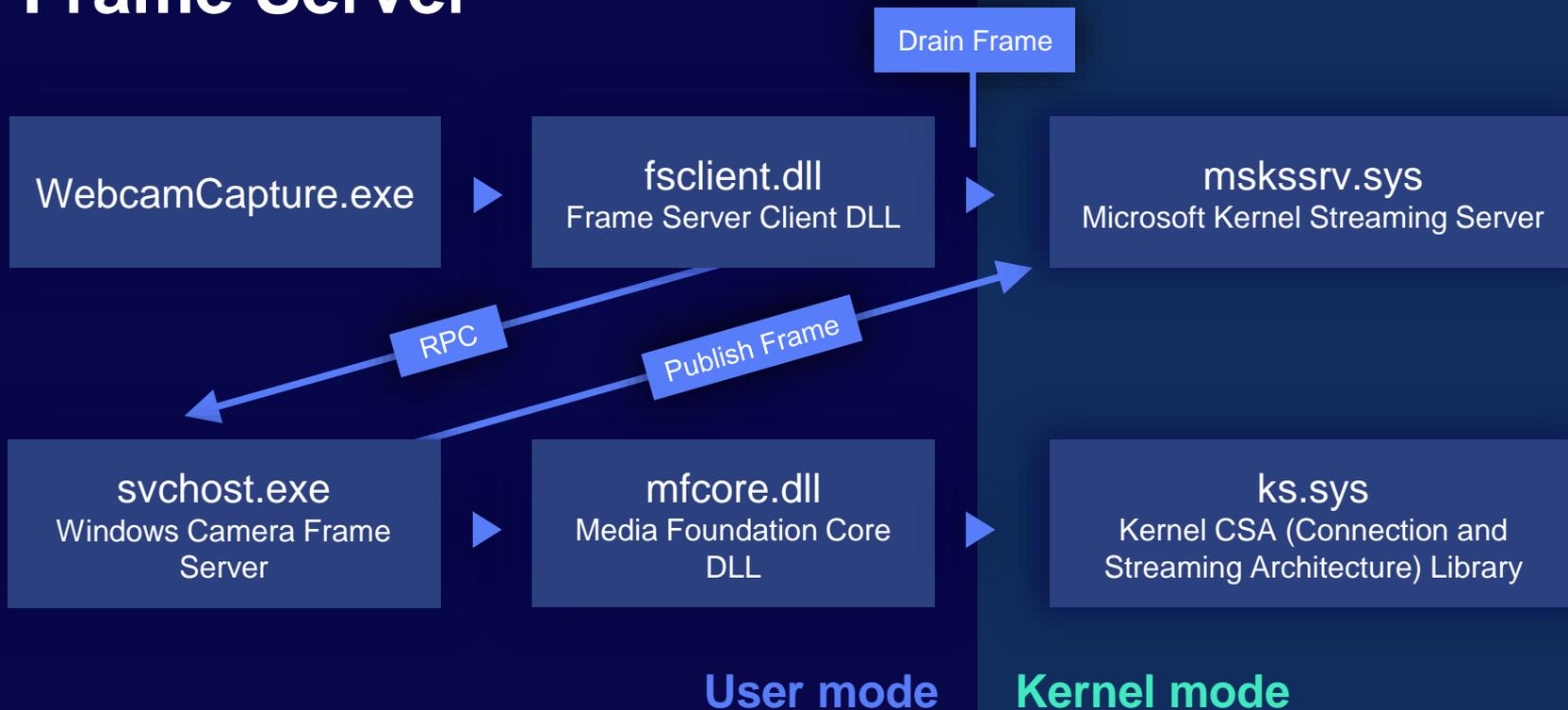
Mike M, Windows Camera Team



The screenshot shows the Windows Task Manager Services tab. The 'FrameServer' service is highlighted in blue, indicating it is running. The table below lists the visible services.

Name	PID	Description	Status	Group
fhsvc		File History Service	Stopped	LocalSystemNe...
FontCache	1504	Windows Font Cache Service	Running	LocalService
FrameServer	4124	Windows Camera Frame Server	Running	Camera
gpsvc	1196	Group Policy Client	Running	netsvcs
GraphicsPerfSvc		GraphicsPerfSvc	Stopped	GraphicsPerfSv...
hidserv		Human Interface Device Service	Stopped	LocalSystemNe...
icsvc		Windows Mobile Hotspot Service	Stopped	LocalServiceNet...
IKEEXT		IKE and AuthIP IPsec Keying Modules	Stopped	netsvcs
InstallService	2312	Microsoft Store Install Service	Running	netsvcs
iphlpvc	1196	IP Helper	Running	NetSvcs
IpxlatCfgSvc		IP Translation Configuration Service	Stopped	LocalSystemNe...

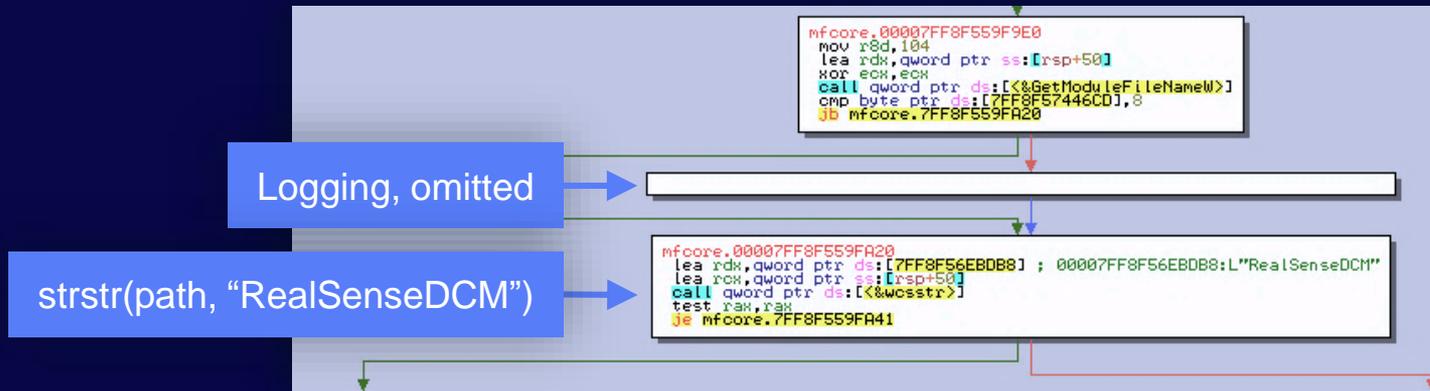
# Frame Server



# Frame Server

Enabled if:

- Application is using Media Foundation (or DirectShow with DShow Bridge enabled).
- Frame Server is not disabled in the registry.
  - The EnableFrameServerMode DWORD value in the following registry branch:  
HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows Media Foundation\Platform
  - Enabled by default if the value is absent.
- The application path doesn't contain "RealSenseDCM".



# Attack Strategies

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# Attack Strategies



## Simple

Just record



## Stealth

Use an existing session



## God Mode

Just record, LED off

## Attack Strategies (1/3)

# Simple

- Just start recording.
- Advantages:
  - Just works, no questions are asked by Windows.  
Note: Since Windows 10 Fall Creators Update, the user is prompted for access to the camera device, but it only applies to Store apps.
  - Many code examples and available programs that can be used.
- Disadvantages:
  - Camera usage will turn on the indicator LED, giving the victim an indication that somebody is watching him.

## Attack Strategies (2/3)

# Stealth

- Use an existing recording session. For example, inject into Skype and intercept the camera traffic.
- Advantages:
  - No unusual indicator LED activity, more difficult for the victim to detect.
- Disadvantages:
  - Not as easy to implement.
  - The attacker can't choose when to record. The recording sessions are chosen by the victim, and might be less valuable.
  - Can be intrusive depending on the implementation, increases the chances of being detected by a security software.

## Attack Strategies (3/3)

# God Mode

- Like the first option, but keep the indicator LED turned off.
- Ideally, it shouldn't be possible to use the camera without turning on the indicator LED. In practice, some models provide this option, or have a design flaw that allows it.
- Examples:
  - *"I've found info on Logitech Webcams, where you can turn off the LED in the registry keys."*  
[psalomonsen, Information Security Stack Exchange](#)
  - *"[...] on our Dell laptop, we find the DLL that comes with the RealTek drivers for our webcam. We quickly zero in on the exported function "TurnOnOffLED()"."*  
[Robert Graham, Errata Security: How to disable webcam light on Windows](#)

Attack Strategies (3/3)

## God Mode

- Advantages:
  - The attacker can record at any time without a visible indication.
- Disadvantages:
  - Device-specific, hard or impossible to do on well-designed devices.

# Protection Driver Development

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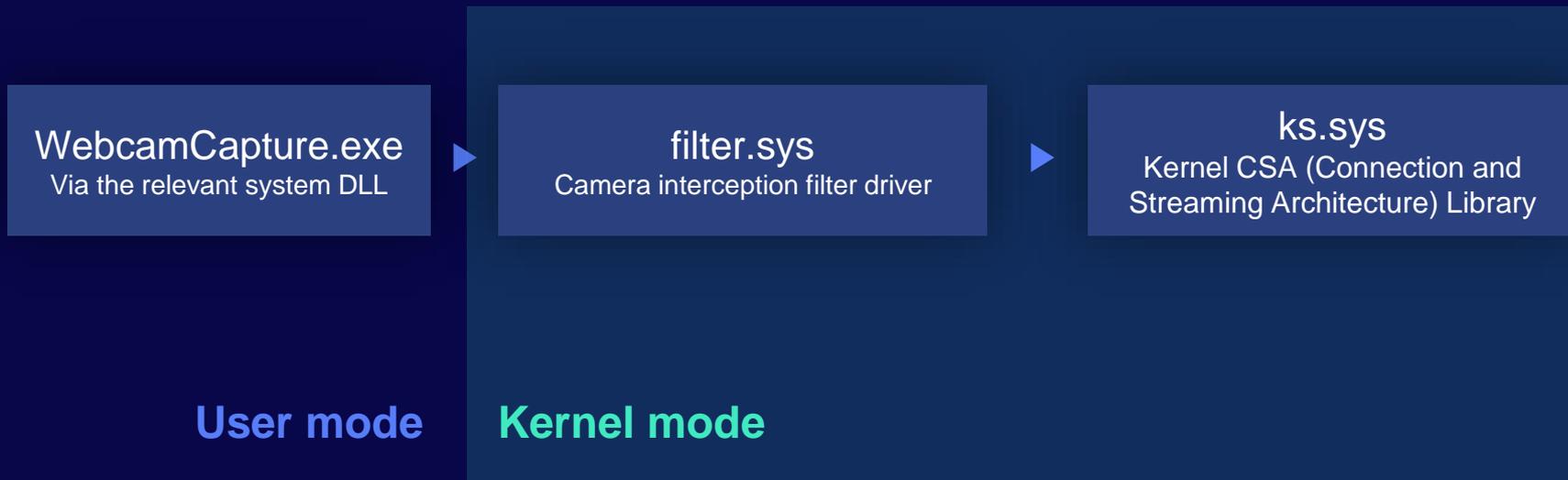
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# Protection Driver Development

- Mostly undocumented, not much information on the internet.
- After some research we can come to the conclusion that the way to go is to implement a filter driver.
- Let's implement a filter driver which logs the IRPs (I/O request packets) that pass through.

# Protection Driver Development



# The Interesting IRPs

```
major: IRP_MJ_CREATE filename: 5C 00 67 00 6C 00 6F 00 62 00 61 00 6C 00
...
major: IRP_MJ_CREATE filename: 7B 00 31 00 34 00 36 00 46 00 31 00 [...] 00 00 00 00
...
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_PROPERTY request: Connection
      KSPROPERTY_CONNECTION_STATE set type: KSSTATE_ACQUIRE
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_PROPERTY request: Connection
      KSPROPERTY_CONNECTION_STATE set type: KSSTATE_PAUSE
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_PROPERTY request: Connection
      KSPROPERTY_CONNECTION_STATE set type: KSSTATE_RUN
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_READ_STREAM
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_READ_STREAM
...
major: IRP_MJ_DEVICE_CONTROL ioctl: IOCTL_KS_PROPERTY request: Connection
      KSPROPERTY_CONNECTION_STATE set type: KSSTATE_STOP
major: IRP_MJ_CLEANUP
major: IRP_MJ_CLEANUP
major: IRP_MJ_CLOSE
major: IRP_MJ_CLOSE
```

Start  
streaming

Read data  
from stream

“\global”  
The KS filter

Next slide...  
The KS pin

# The IRP\_MJ\_CREATE for the KS Pin

major: IRP\_MJ\_CREATE filename: 7B 00 31 00 34 00 36 00 46 00 31 00 [...] 00 00 00 00



{146F1A80-4791-11D0-A5D6-28DB04C10000}\???



The object name is a GUID followed by binary data

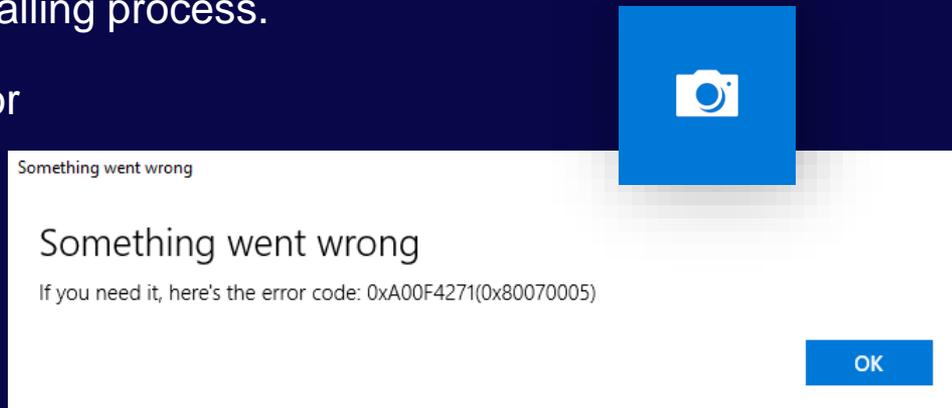


{146F1A80-4791-11D0-A5D6-28DB04C10000} stands for KSNNAME\_Pin



# Blocking Access to the Camera

- The simplest solution is to block **IOCTL\_KS\_PROPERTY** when the **KSSTATE\_ACQUIRE** command is sent.
- Note: The kernel streaming IOCTLs use the 'neither' buffering method. Data must be accessed from the context of the calling process.
- The capturing program will get an error while trying to initiate the capture.

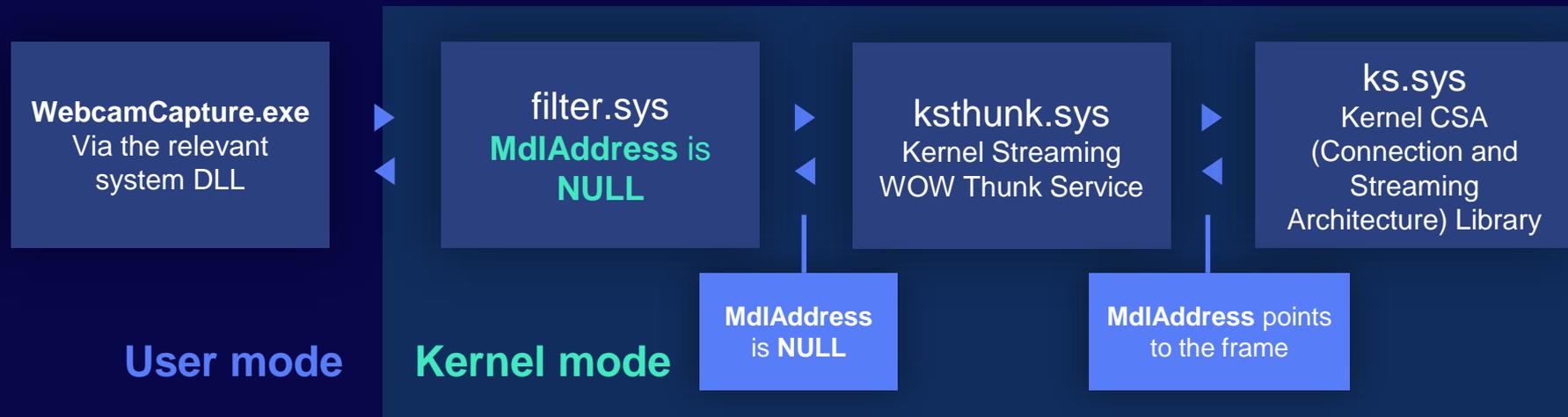


**What if we want to return a  
fake image instead?**

# Replacing the Image Frames

- We can post-process **IOCTL\_KS\_READ\_STREAM** and replace the frame image before it leaves the kernel mode.
- The frame image buffer is mapped for us by the camera function driver, and can be accessed via **Irp->MdlAddress**.
- **Irp->MdlAddress** can be **NULL** sometimes. The reason - the **ksthunk** filter driver, designed to provide streaming compatibility for 32-bit programs on a 64-bit system.

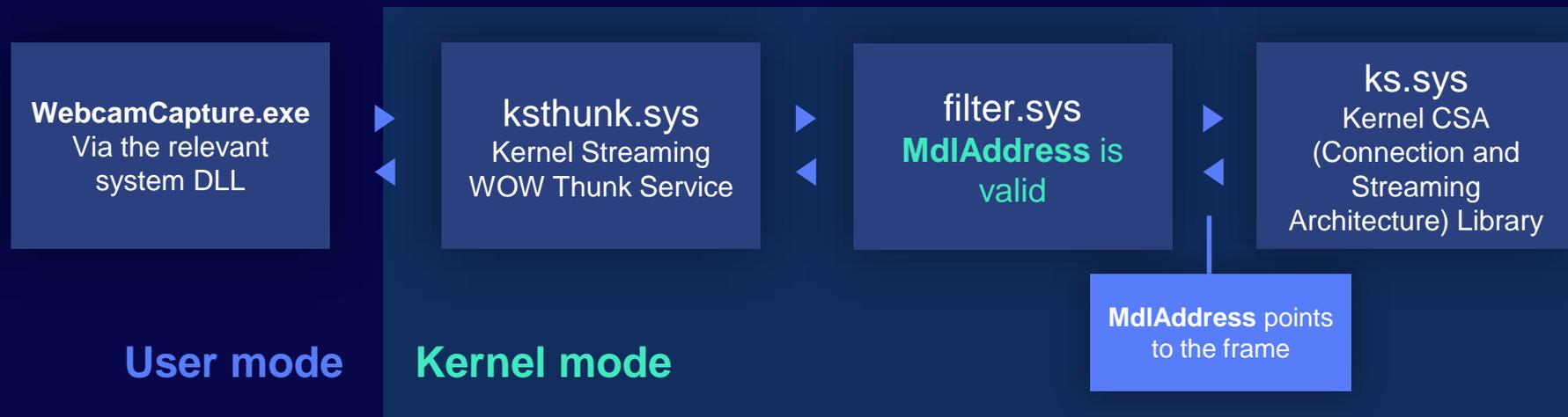
# Replacing the Image Frames



# Replacing the Image Frames

- The solution - place our filter driver before **ksthunk** on the stack.

# Replacing the Image Frames



# Per-process Selective Blocking

- Typical design - maintain a list of allowed programs such as Skype and the web browser while blocking other, unknown programs.
- Used to be straightforward before the introduction of the Frame Server - The process accessing the camera device is the one to be checked against the list.
- Since the introduction of the Frame Server, **svchost.exe** (hosting the Frame Server) will be accessing the camera device every time Media Framework is used.

# Per-process Selective Blocking

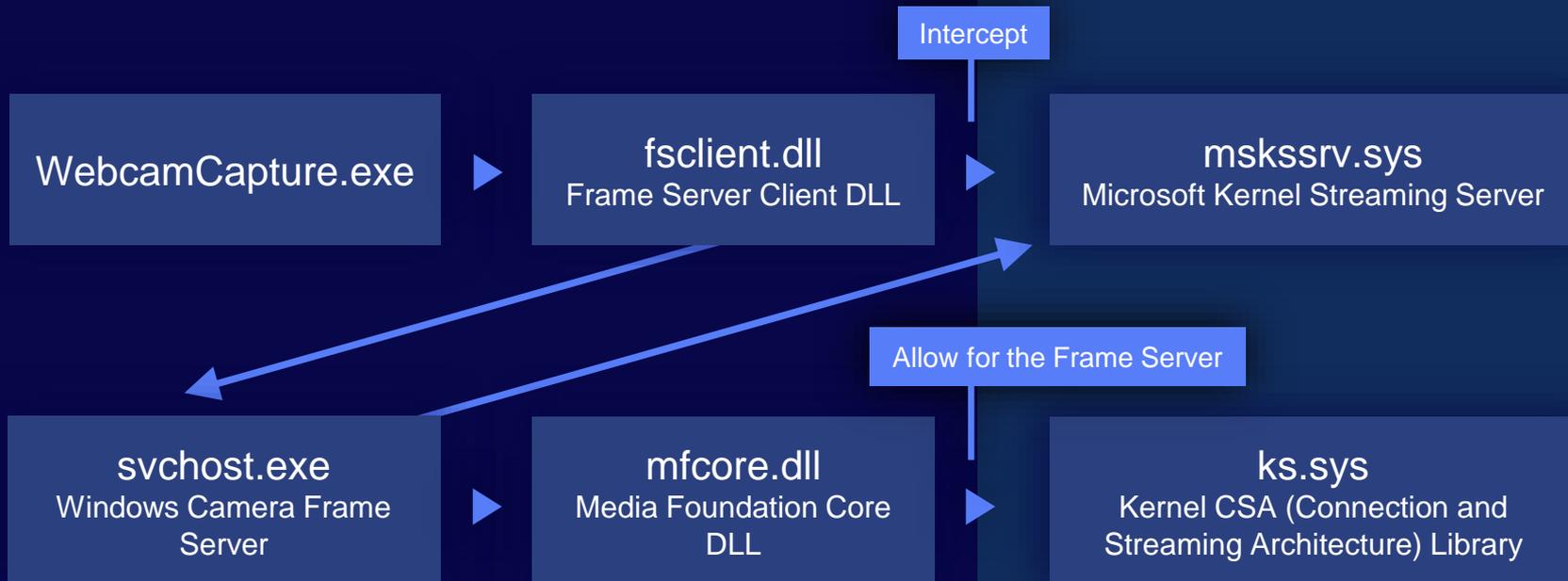
- We need an alternative way to determine which process is accessing the camera.
- A possible solution - intercept access to **mskssrv.sys**, the Kernel Streaming Server.

# Per-process Selective Blocking

## Things to note:

- If intercepting access to **mksrv.sys**, the process hosting Frame Server needs to be whitelisted.
- You need to be careful about trusting an allowed program, e.g. in case of a code injection scenario.

# Per-process Selective Blocking



User mode

Kernel mode

# Existing Protection Solutions

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## Existing Protection Solutions

# Protection Driver Development

We checked 6 well known security products with camera protection functionality.

	Frame Server support	Upper filter registered (*)	Default action on first run
Product 1	✓	✓	Block and notify
Product 2	X	X	Block and notify if untrusted
Product 3	✓	Only for the Frame Server	Always notify, block if untrusted
Product 4	✓	X	Block and notify if untrusted
Product 5	X	✓	Block and notify if untrusted
Product 6	X	X	Notify, no blocking functionality

(\*) If not, an interception device is being attached to the camera driver stack at runtime.

## Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1

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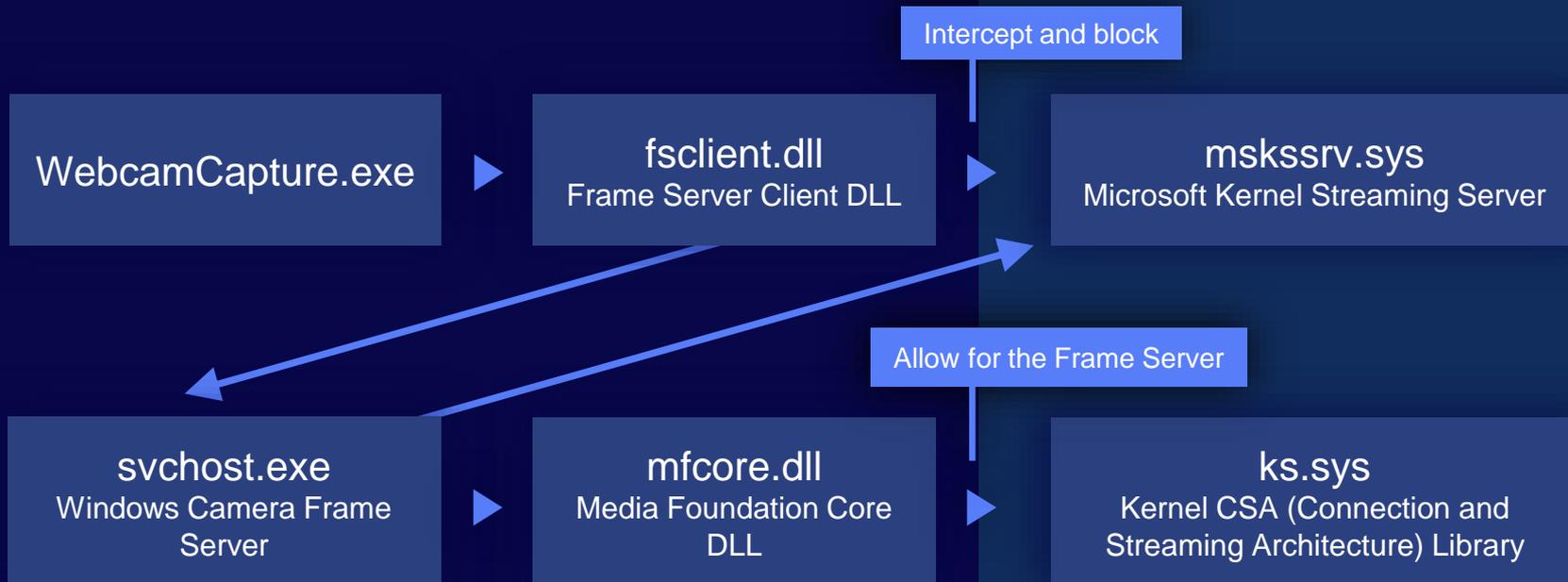
## Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1

- After some experimentation we can see that Frame Server is supported by intercepting and blocking access to **mskssrv.sys**, the Kernel Streaming Server.
- In that case, the Frame Server user mode process (**svchost.exe**, hosting the Frame Server) is probably whitelisted.
- What if we inject into it and try to capture?

	Frame Server support	Upper filter registered	Default action on first run
Product 1	✓	✓	Block and notify

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1



User mode

Kernel mode

Existing P

Prod

Webcam

svch

Windows G

svchost.exe:7568 (Camera) Properties

Image Performance Performance Graph Disk and Network  
GPU Graph Services Threads TCP/IP Security Environment Strings

User: NT AUTHORITY\LOCAL SERVICE  
SID: S-1-5-19  
Session: 0 Logon Session: 3e5  
Virtualized: No Protected: No

Group	Flags
LOCAL	Mandatory
Mandatory Label\System Mandatory Level	Integrity
NT AUTHORITY\Authenticated Users	Mandatory
NT AUTHORITY\LogonSessionId_0_21615451	Owner
NT AUTHORITY\SYSTEM	Mandatory
NT AUTHORITY\This Organization	Mandatory
<b>NT SERVICE\FrameServer</b>	<b>Owner</b>
S-1-5-32-2035927579-283314533-3422103930-358...	Mandatory
S-1-5-32-3659434007-2290108278-1125199667-36...	Mandatory
S-1-5-32-383293015-3350740429-1839969850-181...	Mandatory

Group SID: S-1-5-80-3915894004-2104103821-3047269622-181166.

Privilege	Flags
SeAssignPrimaryTokenPrivilege	Disabled
SeAuditPrivilege	Disabled
SeChangeNotifyPrivilege	Default Enabled
SeCreateGlobalPrivilege	Default Enabled
SeImpersonatePrivilege	Default Enabled
SeIncreaseQuotaPrivilege	Disabled
SeIncreaseWorkingSetPrivilege	Disabled
SeShutdownPrivilege	Disabled

Permissions

OK Cancel

Attempt 1

Intercept and block

mskssrv.sys  
Microsoft Kernel Streaming Server

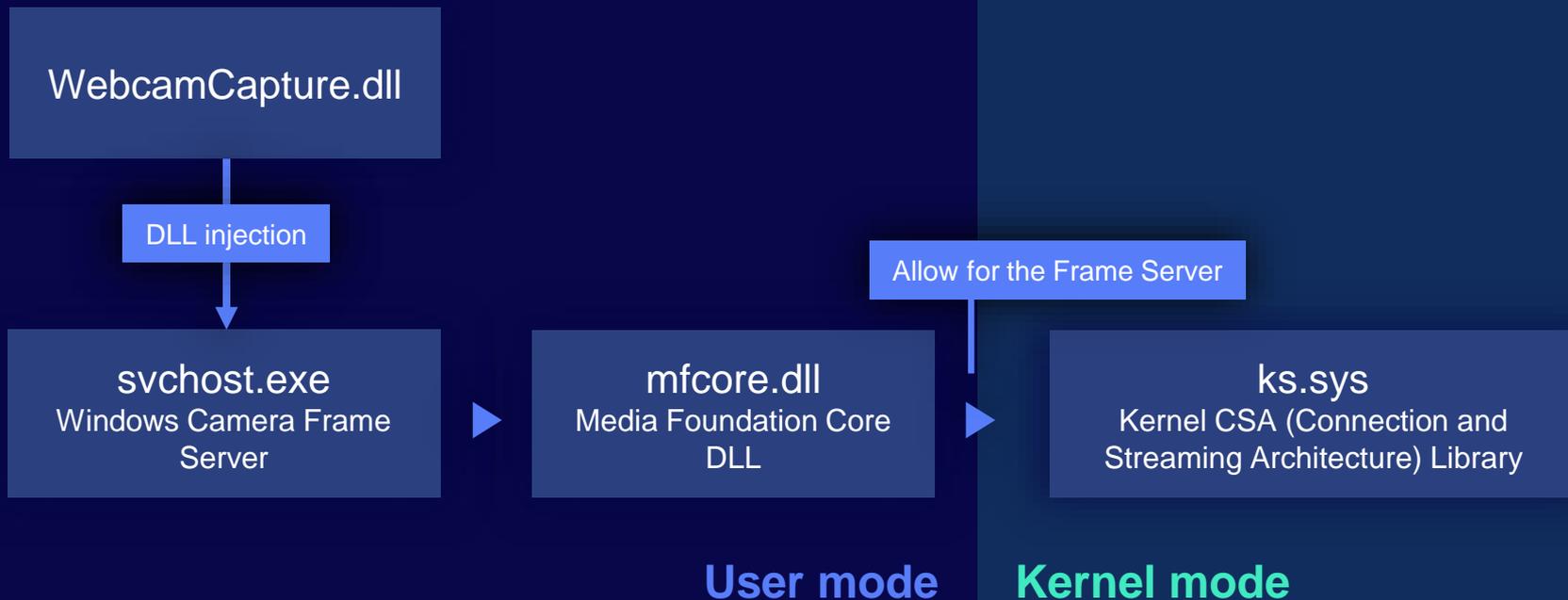
Allow for the Frame Server

ks.sys  
Kernel CSA (Connection and Streaming Architecture) Library

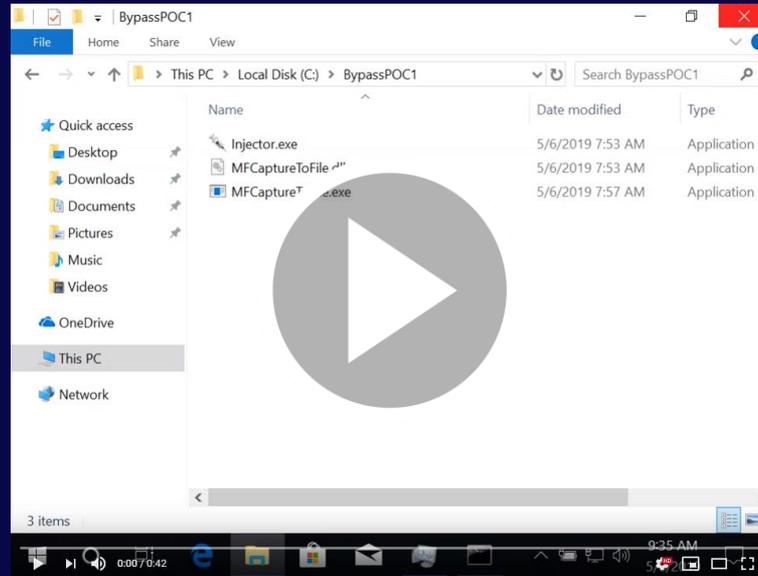
User mode

Kernel mode

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1



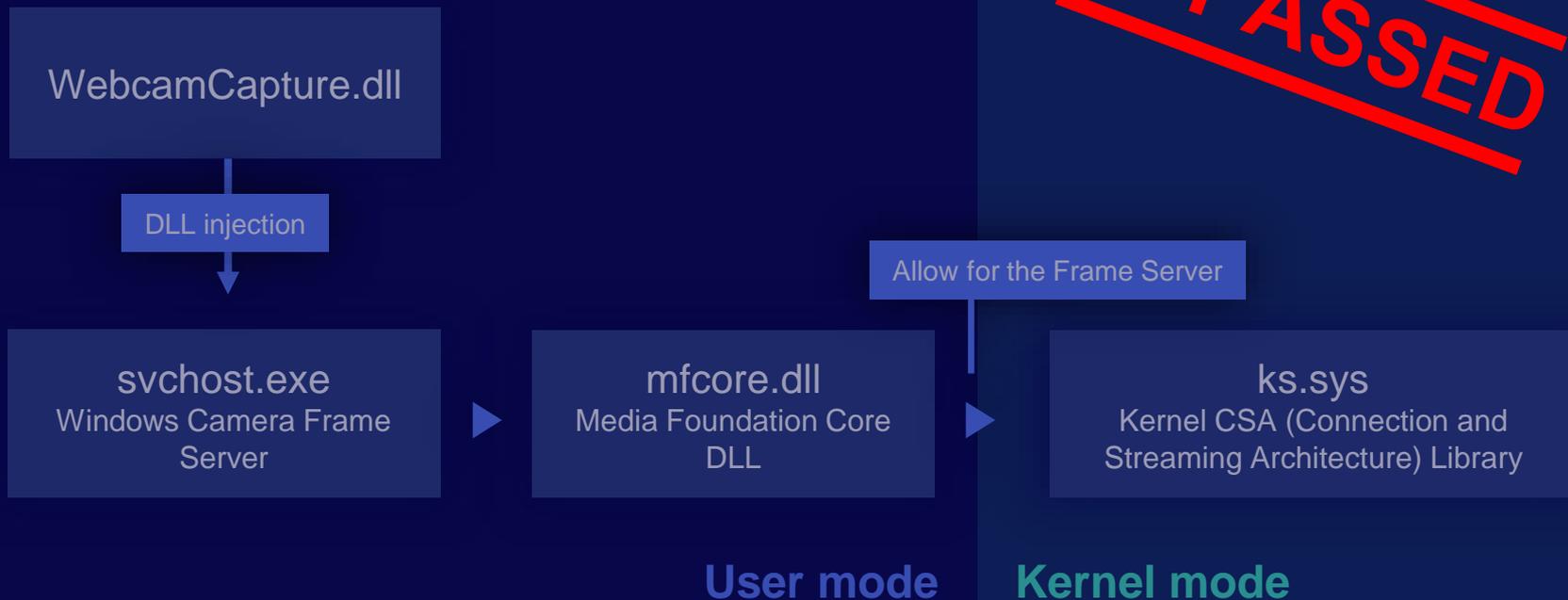
# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1



<https://youtube.com/watch?v=-bnpcIzIXsA>

Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 1



## Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 2

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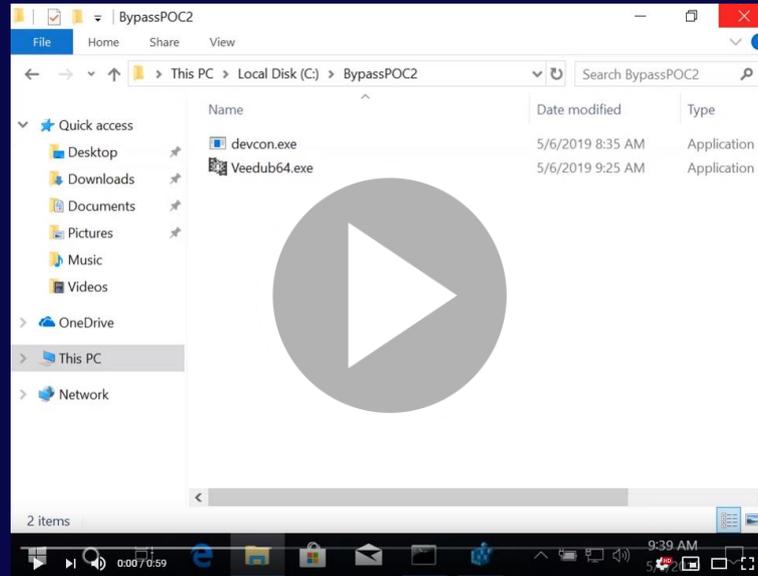
## Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 2

- Now let's try something simpler: What happens if we try to remove the registered upper filter driver from the registry?
- Surprisingly, nothing stops us from doing it.
- Now it's enough to disable and re-enable the camera device to get the security filter driver removed from the driver stack.

	Frame Server support	Upper filter registered	Default action on first run
Product 1	✓	✓	Block and notify

# Product 1, Bypass Attempt 2



<https://youtube.com/watch?v=JKzoqGk3vTk>

## Existing Protection Solutions

# Product 2

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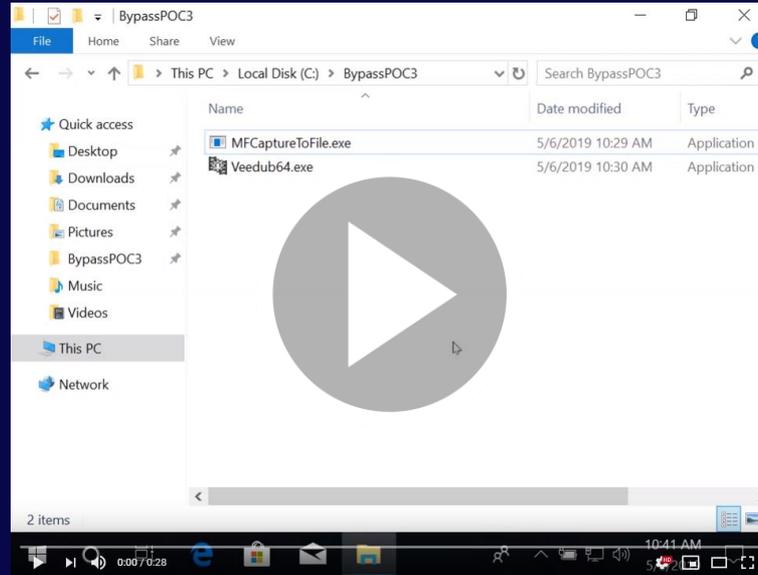
## Existing Protection Solutions

## Product 2

- No Frame Server support - every program accessing the camera via the Frame Server is being reported as **svchost.exe**.
- **svchost.exe**, being a system process, is trusted by default.
- It's enough to have our capturing program use Media Foundation to bypass the protection.

	Frame Server support	Upper filter registered	Default action on first run
Product 2	X	X	Block and notify if untrusted

# Product 2



 <https://youtube.com/watch?v=Z-64HGY8HtM>

## Existing Protection Solutions

## Product 2

- No Frame Server support - every program accessing the camera via the Frame Server is being reported as **svchost.exe**.
- **svchost.exe**, being a system process, is trusted by default.
- It's enough to have our capturing program use Media Foundation to bypass the protection.

**BYPASSED**

	Frame Server support	Upper filter registered	Default action on first run
Product 2	X	X	Block and notify if untrusted

## Existing Protection Solutions

# Summary

	Frame Server injection	Media Foundation usage	Upper filter removal
Product 1	<b>Bypassed</b>		<b>Bypassed</b>
Product 2		<b>Bypassed</b>	
Product 3	<b>Bypassed</b>		<b>Bypassed</b>
Product 4	<b>Bypassed (*)</b>		
Product 5		<b>Bypassed</b>	<b>Bypassed</b>
Product 6			

(\*) Frame Server injection was blocked, but injecting into any other trusted program works.

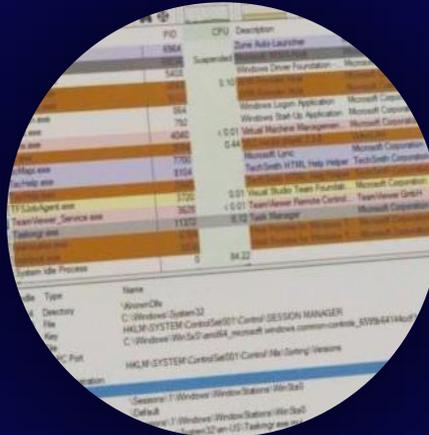
# Lessons

- If you trust a system service, make sure it can't be tampered with.
- Don't forget to apply self-protection for features that can be otherwise just disabled.
- Follow and adapt to the OS architecture changes - in our case that's the introduction of the Frame Server.

# Conclusions



**A significant  
privacy threat**



**Webcam-related  
Windows internals**



**Software protection  
is not perfect**

# Sharing is Caring

- A technical paper on the subject:  
[Through the looking glass: webcam interception and protection in kernel mode](#)
- A sample driver for blocking access to the camera:  
<https://github.com/ReasonSoftware/webcam-interception-driver>
- Contact me for any additional information.  
[✉ michael.maltsev@reasonsecurity.com](mailto:michael.maltsev@reasonsecurity.com)  
[🐦 @m417z](https://twitter.com/m417z)

**Thank You**

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Questions?