The FBI Releases Code Challenge to Hackers

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation, that's right, the FBI, has just released a Code Challenge for hackers around the world! Here are the details:

> A relatively basic form of substitution cipher is the Caesar Cipher, named for its Roman origins. The Caesar Cipher involves writing two alphabets, one above the other. The lower alphabet is shifted by one or more characters to the right or left and is used as the cipher text to represent the plain text letter in the alphabet above it.

Plain Text:

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
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Cipher Text:

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B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A
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In this example, the plain text K is enciphered with the cipher text L. The phrase 'Lucky Dog' would be enciphered as follows:

Plain Text: L U C K Y D O G

Cipher Text: M V D L Z E P H

Ciphers can be made more secure by using a keyword to scramble one of the alphabets. Keywords can be placed in the plain text, the cipher text, or both, and any word can be used as a key if repeated letters are dropped. Here the word SECRETLY (minus the second E) is used as the plain text keyword.

Plain Text:

> S E C R T L Y A B D F G H I J K M N O P Q U V W X Z

Cipher Text:

> A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

The FBI of course doesn't always invite folks to break code on its site. In fact last spring a consultant managed to access the bureau's National Crime Information Center database.

Is this a ploy to get the hacker community back to its roots? Most certainly we seem to lose touch to what this is all about. Or perhaps just an elaborate way to recruit future employees due to the inability to advertise for positions?

What do you think?