

BYTES & PIECES

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BOOTIT AND MORE

I was looking for a boot manager that could control LindowsOS' rather aggressive implementation of LiLo, so that I could run other distributions of Linux alongside LindowsOS for comparison purposes and read in Fred Langa's excellent Langelist that BootIt NG could do just that.

BootIt New Generation (NG), however, is far more than a boot manager, even if it can manage more than four primary drives. It can partition and format drives in all popular formats, it can make and restore drive images (splitting them into CD-sized files, if required), and it can resize partitions without losing the data they contain. In short, it is a comprehensive disk management utility package, that performs all of those vital functions that you need from time to time.

A number of additional utilities are available as freeware from the BootIt NG website. Check these out at: <http://www.bootitng.com/utilities.html>.

How well does BootIt NG work? Compared to Partition Magic it is not as slick or as fast, but it is thorough and reliable. Its graphical interface runs on DOS, not Windows, and carries out one task at a time, rather than batching tasks as Partition Magic does. The entire software fits on a floppy disk which can be used for installation, or as a rescue/reactivation disk. You can burn it on to CD and use that if you prefer. However, this will only work if your computer's CMOS supports booting from a CD-ROM disk. All recent motherboards do, but it is something to bear in mind if you are planning to use BootIt NG on an older computer.

As for LindowsOS or any other operating system that tries to take over your primary drive, just put it on another primary drive and hide it when you don't want to use it. Similarly, hide the primary drive that you don't want LindowsOS to see and it cannot take it over. Alternatively, you can let LindowsOS (or whatever) take over and then reactivate BootIt NG by using the floppy or CD disk. Either way, you have control, not the rogue operating system.

You can obtain a 30-day trial from <http://www.bootit.com>, at the expiration of which you are required to

discontinue use, or buy a copy at \$USD34.95, which is about \$54 at current exchange rates (after remittance costs).

SPAM ASSASSIN AND SPAMNIX

Our old friends Southern Internet Services, now known as Keypoint, are using SpamAssassin to assess email passing through their servers.

SpamAssassin puts its assessment into your email in a form similar to this:

```
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook Express 5.01.1789.8910
X-Spam-Status: Yes, hits=6.5 required=5.0
    tests=FORGED_MUA_OUTLOOK,HTML_00_10,HTML_MESSAGE,
        HTML_TAG_BALANCE_HTML,MIME_HTML_NO_CHARSET,
        MIME_MISSING_BOUNDARY
    version=2.55
X-Spam-Level: *****
X-Spam-Checker-Version: SpamAssassin 2.55 (1.174.2.19-2003-05-19-exp)
X-Spam-Report: ---- Start SpamAssassin results
    6.50 points, 5 required;
    * 0.2 -- BODY: HTML has unbalanced "html" tags
    * 1.4 -- BODY: Message is 0% to 10% HTML
    * 0.1 -- BODY: HTML included in message
    * 0.5 -- RAW: MIME section missing boundary
    * 0.6 -- RAW: Message text in HTML without specified charset
    * 3.7 -- Forged mail pretending to be from MS Outlook
    ---- End of SpamAssassin results
X-Spam-Flag: YES
```

As you can see, SpamAssassin uses a wide selection of criteria to assess whether the email is spam and reports the result by setting a flag. You can use this to move spam to a separate folder or mailbox. Just set up a rule or filter to detect the set *X-Spam Flag: YES* line.

However, Keypoint, or any other ISP using SpamAssassin doesn't know what mailing lists you have signed up for, or what you consider to be spam. While there are services, like SpamArrest, that you can use, you will get greatest control over spam by running a suitable application on your computer. That doesn't rule out using SpamAssassin, though. There is even a version, called Spamnix, which integrates with Eudora and that's what I am currently trialling.

Spamnix learns from the emails that you receive. To train it fully you need 200 emails that are not spam, and 200 that are. These should be in mailboxes that only contain non-spam, or spam respectively, not a mixture. You then get Spamnix to train itself using the contents of those mailboxes.

Incoming emails that Spamnix classifies as spam are moved to the Spamnix mailbox. You can then go through it and accept or reject it. Because of the way Eudora operates, (or so Spamnix claims), this can only be done after opening each message and not from the preview. Even before training, Spamnix gets few false positives (wrongly identifying emails as spam) so the easiest way to deal with them is to transfer them to a separate mailbox and train Spamnix to accept them. The rest of the contents of the Spamnix box can then be used to train Spamnix to recognise those types of messages as spam.

Mail that you want to accept can be processed in either of two ways. You can have Spamnix learn about it with its Bayesian filters, or you can make a rule regarding its origins, its recipient, or its subject matter. Unfortunately, the rules don't extend to the content of it, but you could use Eudora's filters to transfer emails containing words that you consider identify spam into the Spamnix mailbox. From there you can train Spamnix to learn from them.

If you don't need integration with Eudora, download the latest SpamAssassin version and try it out.

<http://www.spamnix.com/>
<http://spamassassin.org/released/Mail-SpamAssassin-2.55.zip>

STAROFFICE 7.0

For some time now I have been testing StarOffice 6.1 beta and have been impressed with the improvements that have been incorporated in it, even using it to create the original (SXW) and PDF versions of this newsletter. Now comes news that there will not be a commercial release of 6.1. Instead, Sun Microsystems has chosen to go to version 7.0 and will release it on 14 October 2003. In the meantime, you can download an evaluation version, but, be warned, it is over 100 MB.

Claimed benefits of the new version include:

- Enhanced Microsoft Office interoperability to facilitate the exchange of documents with Microsoft Office users
- Increased interoperability, including new filters for PDF, Macromedia Flash, XML, PlaceWare, and small device formats
- Accessibility features and Java API to support assistive technologies, so people with disabilities can use all StarOffice features
- Increased usability for StarSuite with vertical writing support
- Writing capability in “complex” languages like Hebrew, Hindi, and Arabic
- Enhanced ease of deployment and user management with the StarOffice Configuration Manager
- Improved ease of use, including a new set of icons, improved online help, and printer-independent layout
- Increased productivity, such as a keyboard macro recorder and a database report generator
- Enhanced stability and performance
- The StarOffice Software Development Kit, to deliver the ability to customize, automate, and integrate StarOffice or Openoffice.org with a customer's existing applications

Right now I am downloading the evaluation version. I'll let you know what I think when I have installed it and run it through its paces. For more information on the new features, check out the link below.

<http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/whatsnew/whatsnewguide.pdf>

BEWARE

Do not open any messages you get that purport to come from Microsoft and claim to be a patch. Delete immediately. As you can see from the wording shown below in red, the latest virus, *Swen.A* has hit Australia. This tries to pass itself off as a security patch for your computer. Opening the attached file infects your computer. Update your antivirus software immediately and, I repeat, don't open or *preview** message like this, especially if you use Outlook or Outlook Express:

[*] [] Microsoft Corporation Public Services 05:10 PM 20/09/2003 +1000 8 New Critical Patch
[] [] MS Corporation Security Center 06:26 PM 21/09/2003 +1000 8 New Microsoft Critical Pack
[] [] Program Security Department 06:23 PM 21/09/2003 +1000 9[hcug-list] Current Network Critical Patch

Microsoft do not distribute patches in this manner. Instead, they direct their users to the update pages on their website.

Here's what Symantec says about this one:

W32.Swen.A@mm is a mass-mailing worm that uses its own SMTP engine to spread itself. It attempts to spread through file-sharing networks, such as KaZaA and IRC, and attempts to kill antivirus and personal firewall programs running on a computer. The worm can arrive as an email attachment. The subject, body, and From: address of the email may vary. Some examples claim to be patches for Microsoft Internet Explorer, or delivery failure notices from qmail.

Know as Swen [F-Secure], W32/Swen@mm [McAfee], W32/Gibe-F [Sophos], or Worm Swen.A the worm exploits a vulnerability in Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express in an attempt to execute itself when you open or even preview the message. Information and a patch for the vulnerability can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/bulletin/MS01-020.asp>

Systems Affected:

Windows 2000, Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows Me, Windows NT, Windows Server 2003, Windows XP

***Turn off the preview pane in Outlook and Outlook Express for maximum security.**

PC MAKERS SUED OVER HARD DRIVE SIZES

Although the makers of hard drives state in their literature what they define a megabyte and a gigabyte as, that measure differs from the one used by operating systems. Thus your 20 GB drive “shrinks” to 18 GB when you format it. So I guess it had to happen ...

A group of people in Los Angeles have started a class action against major manufacturers of computers alleging that they're misadvertising the capacity of hard drives included in the machines. The manufacturers being sued, according to *Reuters* are Apple, Dell, Gateway, HP, IBM, Sony, Sharp and Toshiba.

The basis of the class action is that hard drives described, for example, as having 80GB capacity, don't actually provide this amount of space.

The plaintiffs want damages, an injunction, "disgorgement of ill gotten profits" and – the telling phrase here, attorneys' fees. Generally speaking, when big class actions are successful, the lawyers end up taking the biggest slice of the pie, with the plaintiffs and those who join the action getting peanuts.

DUMB COMPUTERS

A teacher from Canberra once told me that “Computers are dumb. That's why you have to learn to use them intelligently.” Here's a little tale that illustrates the profundity of that statement.

Auto-response to emails received while you're away is a great idea, but, thanks to dumb computers, it doesn't always work out that way, as this extract from Fred Langa's Langelist shows:

Fred – On the Berry College campus, we had a little auto-response problem last year. One of our teachers went on vacation, so she set up an auto-reply to anyone who sent her a message. Just before doing this, she contacted the campus help desk about some problem she was having; her service request was entered into the Remedy database. Remedy generated an automatic email telling her that her service request was entered - and of course, her "away" message went back to the Remedy database.

When the email arrived, Remedy sent an email back to her telling her that she didn't need to send email to that particular address, because it's automated and humans don't actually check the account....and of course, this caused the teacher's email account to generate another "away" message back to the Remedy database. This back-and-forth continued until about 200 MB were left on the email server's drives. The network services department spent quite a while deleting all those emails from her account - many thousands of them, in fact. --Chris Lewis

So before you set up that auto-response, is there something out there that will send you auto-responses?

BUY BUY

Gowans have some HP Vectra Pentium II/350 with 256MB of RAM for \$133.20. They're available Monday to Thursday, 9 am – 5 pm at 33 Main Road, Moonah. Enquiries: Phone 6278 1600.

Have you noticed any bargains around town? Email editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au with the details for inclusion in the first available *Bytes & Pieces* so that all members can take advantage of them. Or, maybe, you have some items you wish to sell. There's no charge to advertise them in this newsletter.