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ANOTHER *&^%@* WORM

There has been an increasing incidence of a worm which masquerades as a message from an ISP or web site – Verizon, AOL, and others; even from Langelist ("Dear user of Langa.com e-mail..." or something similar). The email usually arrives with a password-protected Zip file attachment that contains executable files. The text of the email tells you how to open it to "protect yourself from spam" or some such.

Whatever you do, do not open the attachment. It's not really from whomever it claims was the sender. No responsible party will **ever** send you an executable file, unasked for, out of the blue – not Microsoft, not AOL, not your ISP and certainly not Fred Langa of Langelist.

Instead of being a useful attachment that will protect you from spam, update Windows, clean your CDs and teach your spouse not to interrupt you when you're writing an article for *Bytes & Pieces*, the attachment contains a trojan designed to infect your system. The worm-writers place the payload in a password-protected file to try to hide from some anti-virus tools. They have also crafted the worm to do an unusually good job of spoofing the formats and headers – it can look quite legitimate, at first glance.

Don't be fooled. Just delete the file and the email. In fact, that is a sensible precaution for any unasked-for attachment that shows up in your email, especially if it doesn't "sound" like a message from someone you know (despite what the "From:" field shows). When in doubt, toss it out (or contact the sender for confirmation that they sent it to you intentionally).

For more information search on your antivirus vendor's website for Bagle or Beagle.

Update your virus software and, if you still think you have been infected, go to the Symantec website and download their removal tool.

<http://www.symantec.com>

SCREENSAVERS TODAY

Screensavers were invented to prevent the phosphor on a monitor screen from having an image burnt into it. I remember years ago a friend of mine bought some XT computers ex Purity and on some of the monitors you could almost read the menu that they had allowed to be displayed all day every day, only changing when

somebody looked something up. That burn in would not have occurred had they used a screensaver.

Once screensavers were invented they gradually became an art form, with fish tanks, spotlights and other imaginative designs being introduced. These made great conversation pieces. However, monitor technology today has rendered their original purpose obsolete. In addition, various countries have introduced energy conservation policies and operating systems have been modified to enable Windows, for example, to blank out the screen after a given interval.

Even with these reasons not to use a screensaver, many computer writers like to try out new ones from time to time.

Wayne Cunningham, Senior Editor, CNET Download.com, recently wrote: *“The first screensavers I really liked made whatever you had on your monitor start to melt. It was fun to watch a spreadsheet drip to the bottom of the screen. Ripple and StickMen are two that wreak pretend-havoc with whatever’s on your screen. Also, screensavers that show amorphous light shows can be fun to run during a party, especially if you also use your computer as a sound system; both Helios and MBSS Light put on good shows.*

“Astronomy screensavers put on a more tangible but equally awe-inspiring display. The Distant Suns - Grand Tour 3D screensaver is particularly beautiful, but the latest version uses adware to support its developer. I find the imagery in 3D Solar Traveler almost as good. Finally, for a personal touch, you can run a photo slide show as a screensaver. Some photo-organizer tools set that up for you, or, if you have Windows XP, you can display the images in your My Pictures folder.

The computer resources that screensavers use have been put to use by the SETI project and others. Perhaps, instead of running a screensaver, you could join the search for extraterrestrial life. Details can be obtained from <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu>.

CRITICAL OUTLOOK PATCH

Since Microsoft decided a couple of years back to tackle the security flaws in their products there has been a constant stream of updates and patches, which should be applied to ensure the security of your computer. For Windows and the products bundled with it (e.g. Internet Explorer), this can largely be taken care of by allowing Windows to install updates automatically. You have the option of approving the installation before it happens, or even before the updated is downloaded.

However, this process does not yet extend to the full range of Microsoft products and you need to keep abreast of critical patches and security advice for the applications that you use. Latest advice is a critical patch for Outlook (not Outlook Express) to fix a recently discovered flaw that could allow a hacker to execute code on your computer through malware contained in a website.

The flaw affects the two latest versions of the company's Outlook email client. Microsoft is warning customers to download and install the patch immediately.

The patch was previously rated as 'important'. The company says in a recent statement: "Based on information regarding a new attack scenario discovered after the bulletin's release Microsoft is increasing the severity rating on MS04-009 from 'important' to 'critical'. "This rating change is to assist customers in making informed risk assessment."

Anyone using Office XP or Outlook 2002 Service Pack 2 is at risk, but those who have already installed the patch are protected.

DUTCH COURT SAYS, “BLOCK ACCESS TO LINDOWS.COM WEBSITE”

The stoush between Lindows.com and Microsoft threw up yet another important issue the other day. A Dutch court granted Microsoft an injunction prohibiting Lindows.com from using the terms Lindows, LindowsOS and Lindows.com in the Benelux countries. Pending appeal, Lindows.com has withdrawn from the Benelux countries completely and placed the following notice on every page of its website:

Important Notice! [Pending Lindows' appeal](#) visitors from the **Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg** are not permitted to access the Lindows.com website or purchase Lindows products.

Microsoft, however, is asking the court to enforce its ruling that Lindows.com must make its website inaccessible to residents of the Benelux countries, despite the fact that an appeal against the ruling has been scheduled to be heard on 31 March 2004 beginning at 1.30 pm.

The issue, as I see it, is, therefore, can a local court order a company no longer trading in its jurisdiction to make a website outside that jurisdiction inaccessible in this manner. Think about it. As Michael Robertson of Lindows.com says: "Since visitors to our website come from international ISPs, proxy servers, anonymizers and other methods, it is impossible for us to comply with such a broad order to block all visitors from Benelux." The only way that Lindows.com could comply would be to block access completely, or change its company, website and product names.

If such an order is enforceable, then the implications are enormous, as are the implications thrown up by Lindows.com of its actions in the US. In a nutshell, a judge in the US proceedings has ruled that Windows is not a protectable trademark, because it was a generic term when registered as a trademark. That ruling is now the subject of an appeal.

EXTENDED SUPPORT FOR WINDOWS 98

A while back I mentioned that Microsoft was phasing out several older products, partly due to security considerations and partly due to them just reaching the end of their planned life. Thanks to public pressure, Microsoft has reviewed the phase out dates and agreed to provide updates and paid support for Windows 98 and Windows 98 Second Edition until 30 June 2006. The software vendor also extended until 30 June 2006 support for Windows Millennium Edition, which was previously set to end on 31 December 2004.

Note: Windows 98, as originally released, no longer works satisfactorily with the latest high-speed CPUs. While you can try patching it, it is better to upgrade to a later version. For more information, please see our current feature article on the Group website. (<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>)

Meantime, it is being widely reported that not only is the release date for the next version of Windows ("Longhorn") slipping back to 2006, but two waves of products that were scheduled for release prior to Longhorn have also slipped back. Delays in their release could push Longhorn even further back.

Watch for SP2 for Windows XP to be released shortly. It is likely to be more of an update than a bugfix and will help bridge the gap between XP and Longhorn.

GOOD BUY

Want a Pentium 233 for a modest price? How about a Hewlett Packard 690C DeskJet for \$60? Or cheap ink cartridges for Lexmark, Brother, Sharp, HP, Epson or Canon? Contact Peter Campbell for further details.

Do you know of any bargains around town? Let me know so that I can pass the details on.

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