

BYTES & PIECES

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE HOBART COMPUTER USERS GROUP INC.

Volume 2 - Number 24

1 April 2004

IN THIS ISSUE

<u>Microsoft in about face.</u>	
Steve Ballmer announces Linux release.....	1.
<u>Bagle worm becomes more dangerous.</u>	
No longer needs an attachment.....	1.
<u>EU finding against Microsoft.</u>	
Record fine and unbundling required.....	2.
<u>More hints on the website.</u>	
Get more out of Windows XP.....	2.
<u>Windows XP updates.</u>	
Add security fixes and new features.....	2.
<u>Better device drivers.</u>	
Don't just rely on XP's.....	3.
<u>A typical phishing expedition.</u>	
How scammers try to get your bank account details.....	3.
<u>Good buy.</u>	
Nice Athlon computer and a heap of software.....	4.

MICROSOFT IN ABOUT FACE

Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft, revealed yesterday that the company had developed a version of Windows that will run Linux applications. To be known as Winux, the new operating system package runs Linux applications in a specially modified partition that appears to Windows as a Windows folder and to Linux as a separate partition. It will be released at 11.59 am local time in all world markets on 1 April 2004.

Ballmer said Winux would revolutionise the PC industry. "No longer will consumers have to choose between competing operating systems. No longer will our company face litigation on the grounds of anti-competitive behaviour. Microsoft now provides the only choice. Consumers will quickly realise this and give us all their operating system and software business."

Linus Torvalds, creator of Linux, on hearing Ballmer's announcement, immediately announced plans to sue Microsoft over the choice of name. "The name Winux", he said, "is only one letter different from the name of our operating system and has obviously been chosen to lead consumers to believe that they are getting a genuine distribution of Linux. We are therefore forced to take legal action to protect our name and will be lodging actions in Europe, America, Australia, Antarctica and anywhere else we can think of."

[top](#)

BAGLE WORM BECOMES MORE DANGEROUS

Bagle, MyDoom and Netsky continue to battle it out for control of your computer with new versions appearing at frequent intervals, all of which means you *must* heed the warnings to patch your email software and version of Windows, as well as update and run your antivirus software frequently. To not do so is to put your own data in danger, and risk infecting your correspondents' computers, something for which they will not thank you.

At the time of writing, Bagle.P and Bagle.Q have been released. Unlike earlier Bagle versions and other worms, these variants do not come via an email attachment; you can infect your computer merely by previewing an infected message.

To prevent this you need to patch your Outlook Express or Outlook email client, update your antivirus and, perhaps, turn off the Preview panel.

These latest, and more destructive, worms are making use of vulnerabilities you should have patched before Christmas. If you haven't updated Windows, Internet Explorer and your email client since the beginning of October last year, you are very much at risk. For details of the patches required, refer in the first instance to Microsoft Security Bulletin MS03-040, described as *Cumulative Patch for Internet Explorer (828750)*. This was originally posted: October 3, 2003 and revised: October 6, 2003. It is recommended reading for any user running Internet Explorer, or any browser that uses the IE engine. An end user version of this bulletin is available at: http://www.microsoft.com/security/security_bulletins/ms03-040.asp

After you have installed that patch, go to Windows Update and see what other security patches you have missed and install them.

Remember, you, and you alone, are responsible if you do not follow the security advice that is freely available. Your computer will become infected and will infect others. It is only a matter of time!

[top](#)

EU FINDING AGAINST MICROSOFT

Although the European Union had earlier been reported as being poised to impose a fine of \$3.2 billion on Microsoft for anti-competitive behaviour in Europe, the judgment handed down this week imposed a fine of only about a quarter of that amount. The decision also required Microsoft to produce a version of Windows without Media Player bundled with it. However, the court, out of deference to competition authorities in other countries did not require Microsoft to market the new version outside of Europe.

According to industry analysts, Microsoft has cash and reserves of \$50 billion and the analysts expect that the fine will have little impact on the company. If the new version is priced the same as, or close to, the price of the existing version, the requirement to unbundle Media Player will also have little impact. What might have a future impact is the precedent that has been set, forcing Microsoft to modify its planned "Longhorn" version. Other companies affected by Microsoft's bundling of applications into Windows could also seek similar judgments.

Microsoft has said it will appeal the decision.

For full details of the decision Paul Turvey suggests you go to:

http://finance.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,4057,9069941%255E462,00.html

[top](#)

MORE HINTS ON WEBSITE

As promised a little while ago, more hints are being added to the website. The latest batch include some very useful hints to get more out of Windows XP. These deal with how to improve on the bundled utilities, give better ways of working and show how to customise XP to your way of working. Further hints will be added at regular intervals, so please check frequently.

Note: Hints published on the website will not, as a rule, appear in this newsletter, as that would involve time-consuming duplication of effort. The website is there for your use, why not check it out.

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/hints/hint-index.htm>

[top](#)

WINDOWS XP UPDATES

Microsoft regularly release updates for Windows. These rectify security problems and add extra features to take advantage of improving hardware. A review of my own Windows XP installation showed more than 40 updates had been installed and there are many more still to be done.

You can choose to allow Windows to update automatically, or you can control the process by going to the Windows update site and only installing those updates that you want. The best way to do this in Windows

XP is to click on *Start*, then click on *Help and Support*, and select *Keep your computer up-to-date with Windows Update*.

If you are using another browser, go to the *Download* site and select updates from there. Save the downloads onto your hard disk and then install them.

Perhaps the most important update is *Service Pack 1a*. This is some 125MB in size. If you don't have a broadband connection, or lack a sufficient download quota, order a CD from Microsoft, look for it on a magazine disc, or have a chat to someone who has already downloaded and saved it on his/her hard disk. Once you have installed it, go to the Windows update site and select any further updates you need.

[top](#)

BETTER DEVICE DRIVERS

Windows XP comes with a lot of support for hardware. You can install internal modems, printers and more without having to find the discs that came with them. If you have had the devices for a while, you may even find that the disc does not have an XP, or even a Windows 2000 driver on it.

If you only want basic support, this is not a problem as Windows XP will find the device and install its bundled driver. However, this will not necessarily be as fully featured as the manufacturer's driver. For example, it may not show the level of ink in your inkjet cartridges, or allow the modems squealing to be heard through the speakers. PC Magazine Labs recently reported on their experience with a Lexmark color laser printer. It suffered from extremely slow printing and poor output quality using the driver that ships with Windows XP. Changing to Lexmark's own driver improved both speed and quality.

The conclusion should be obvious. Visit the manufacturer's website and download the latest driver for your device. This applies, even if your device came with a disc bearing an XP driver. It may have been updated since the disc was pressed. If necessary, use the Windows XP modem driver to enable you to get on the 'Net and obtain the driver you need.

[top](#)

A TYPICAL PHISHING EXPEDITION

If you received the following email, what would be your reaction?

Dear Valued Customer,

We have just installed our new security system which will help you to avoid frequently fraud transactions and to keep your investments in safety.

Due to this technical update we are insisting our clients to verify/reactivate their accounts.

Please click on the link below and wait while a new window opens. Then fill out Westpac account verification form and click the 'submit' button. The verification process normally takes about 10 seconds but it may take longer during certain times of the day. When your information will be successfully updated, you will return to the main page.

<https://olb.westpac.com.au/>

We appreciate your business. It's truly our pleasure to serve you.

Westpac Customer Care

Notice the stilted language, indicative, perhaps, of a foreign origin. That's the first clue that should strike you, if you have a Westpac account. Of course, if you don't have one, that fact itself should be your first warning that something is a bit "fishy".

If you followed the link with Mozilla Firefox 0.8, you might spot, as I did, "http://deret-lens.info/west/jsp.html" flash briefly on the screen before being replaced by "http://www.westpac.com.au/in-

ternet/publish.asf/Content/404+Page". That indicates the link in the email was being redirected from what did not appear to be a Westpac URL to one that did. Along the way I got a low grade encryption warning. All of which sounded highly suspicious so I typed "Westpac account verification" into Google and found the following report by Kristyn Maslog-Levis of ZDNet dated 17 March 2004:

Phishing complaints from Westpac customers have "massively" declined since the height of the hoax last year, according to the bank.

Julian Quinn, a Westpac spokesperson, said most of the calls they get from customers today are information regarding the latest hoax e-mail and associated Web site they have just received. "We are finding that customers are not contacting us as often as they used to and most of them are quite aware already of the scam that's victimising other banks as well," Quinn said.

"Most people call us saying they just got another one of those hoax e-mails and asking if we are aware of it already, which is quite different from the phone calls we used to get," Quinn added.

Westpac have increased notices to spread awareness about the hoax e-mails and associated Web sites. In their telephone messages, Web site and national advertising, Westpac emphasises that the company will not ask customers to change their personal accounts or log in details via e-mail. The high level of community awareness has paid off, the bank claims, with a massive drop of the number of victims.

"We are cooperating with the police and agencies with overseas jurisdiction to identify these scammers and shut them down. When we find a hoax Westpac Web site, we contact the ISP of the site and contact the central police. We also have an arrangement with Australian telecommunications companies to lock the backbone of these sites," said Quinn.

Westpac warns customers of a new round of phishing scams littering customer' e-mails. The latest hoax e-mails tells customers that Westpac has "just installed a new security system which will help customers avoid frequently fraud transactions and keep their investments in safety."

At the moment, the police are already investigating a number of suspected e-scammers behind the hoax e-mails and Web sites in Australia.

So use a little common sense when you receive emails asking you to visit what should be a secure site and verify something. Don't follow the link and don't visit such sites unless you have typed the URL into your browser. Be alert for suspicious language. And remember that responsible organisations do not request such verification by email.

[top](#)

Good Buy

Buy the computer and sell the software for the bargain of the year! \$400 the lot!

CPU: 1.33Ghz Athlon

Video: 2D/3D Banshee Soundblaster

CDR/RW: 8-4-32x Creative

ZIP: Internal 100MB

Extra cooling: Drive bay fans

RAM: 392 Mb

USB: 1.1 x 2, 4 x USB 2.0

DVD: Player

Modem: 56K fax/voice external

Bonus: Approx \$400.00 (RRP) of brand new still sealed software!

Contact: Graeme Scobie <gels@netspace.net.au>

[top](#)

Produced with: OpenOffice.org 1.1. **Last changed:** 30 Mar 2004
Editor: Peter Campbell, C/-Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.,
PO Box 563, Rosny Park Tas 7018, Australia.
Phone: (03) 6234 4691 **Email:** editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed herein are those of the Editor or the author of the item concerned and are not necessarily endorsed by the Management Committee of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. While care is taken in compiling the information in this newsletter, the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. and its officers and members cannot take responsibility for any problems arising from the use of the information.