

BYTES & PIECES.

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ONLINE TUTORIALS

Have you just installed Eudora, Mozilla, Paintshop Pro, or OpenOffice.org? Do you need some help with Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer or Outlook Express? Now you need look no further than our website to find a link that will take you to exactly what you need to get you started, or help you explore the more advanced features of your chosen software. As part of the major revamp of the website, which has occupied all my spare time in the last few weeks, I have added a selection of the best online tutorials and documentation I could find. For example, for Mozilla there is one from Deakin University. For Microsoft Office, try Florida Gulf Coast University. And for Internet Explorer try Microsoft Insider. You'll find the new links under Other Websites.

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WE HAVE ANSWERS ...

What is a simple way to keep items straight when you close the lid on your scanner? How can you stop those animated GIFs from irritating you? What are mouse gestures? How can you zoom in and out with the mouse's scroll wheel? If the Eudora setup program fails to work, what can you do? How do you send an HTML email with Eudora? How do you add comments or notes to a spreadsheet cell? How do you get rid of unwanted fonts in Windows? How do you change the default Print button behaviour in OpenOffice.org? You'll find the answers to all these and many more questions in our new enlarged Hints section.

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OUT OF CHINA

Excellent Chinese software is now reaching us here in the West. One of the most recent is *Foxmail*, a free email client that includes spam protection, digital signature and encryption. It is compatible with Hotmail, Yahoo, and MSN. Check it out at <http://fox.foxmail.com.cn/english.htm>

While not free, this Java-based office suite from China's leading developer of Office software, Evermore Integrated Office, is described by its creators as "the first REAL Office".

"*EIOffice* is a seamlessly integrated Office environment. Unlike separate applications thrown together into a

suite, designed by a marketing plan, then forced to work together, *EIOffice* delivers one user interface, programmed under one roof, by one team, with one design, one file format, providing true data integration, focused on enhanced user productivity. All your Office applications have now been integrated into a single program. “Start *EIOffice* and you launch just one Office - not a word processor, then a spreadsheet and then a business graphics application. *EIOffice* users control all text, worksheets, slides, presentations, charts, tables and graphs from one application using the simple and intuitive application bar or navigation pane.”

At least that is what the makers claim. I haven't installed either of these applications, but it is good to see new competitors entering the market, especially when they offer a different approach. That kind of competition inspires improvements in our favourite applications and so we all benefit. For more details on *EIOffice* see http://www.evermoresw.com/weben/product/advanced_features.jsp.

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LOOKING FOR A GOOD BOOK?

The world's largest online marketplace for books, this site has a huge inventory - Over 50 million books offered by more than 12,000 booksellers. New, used, rare and out-of-print books. You can search for, first editions, or special editions, with or without dustcovers, in high medium and low price categories. And in fact any title by any author, in every major city in the the entire world. If you are a book-lover you have to visit this site!

When I read about this site in a Tudogs newsletter, I visited it and found that they had featured Anzac Day in their features on the home page! Not only relevant to the date, but relevant to Australian visitors to the site. Now that's good marketing. Check it out at <http://www.abebooks.com/>.

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BAYESIAN FILTERS

Although estimates vary, it would seem that more than 60 percent of email is now spam. Many methods of blocking it have been tried, but the one that seems to hold out the greatest hope is Bayesian filters. These are more or less based on the Bayes rule of conditional probability that estimates the likelihood of an event (hypothesis) given the certainty of another event (evidence). If an event has occurred in the past, we can estimate its likelihood in the future based on how often it occurred in the past.

Applied to spam, this means that if we break a message down into its elements (words, HTML tags, URLs, etc.) and we find that particular elements recur frequently in spam and not in ordinary mail, we can estimate with some confidence that messages containing them are spam.

A typical Bayesian antispam filter consists of a database for collecting messages (evidence) and an inference engine for assigning probability (confidence) ratings and a filter. As messages arrive, the engine rates them, assessing the individual elements and assigning a rating to each message as a whole. It then copies them to the database. If a given rating indicates that a message is probably spam, the filter blocks it from the in-box. Users can flag any spam that gets through.

To achieve useful results an antispam program based on Bayes's theorem must look at all the evidence and compare it with both spam and nonspam samples to arrive at the probability that an individual message is spam. This not only helps prevent messages being wrongly identified as spam (false positives) but also catches flags that don't occur to people. (Surprisingly, ff0000, the HTML code for bright red, is as much of a spam indicator as any pornographic term.) The filters aren't fooled by cheap tricks, either. Extra characters inserted into known spam words (as in "S*E*X!!!") will not pass, because such things do not appear in ordinary correspondence.

Unfortunately, this does not mean that Bayesian filters can keep your mailbox spam free. You will always see some spam because spammers are always thinking up new ways to beat the filtering. It is also because Bayesian filters try not to block good mail and, in order to do that, they need training. Training involves looking at thousands of messages – probabilities always do – but good antispam software comes pretrained, so that the amount of training needed before they become useful to you, is kept to a minimum.

In use, you have to be conscientious. If you don't identify spam as such, or if you flag good mail as spam by mistake, it will affect the accuracy of the filter's rating system. The designers of antispyware software do not apply all of Bayes' precepts. To minimize the chance of losing good mail, designers make simplifying assumptions and give varying weights to different evidence, and these variations affect performance.

Bayesian filters are a useful weapon in the war on spam, but they're not perfect. The best solutions employ other techniques as well, such as white- and blacklists, honeypots, and community filtering. For more information on antispyware techniques and how effectively antispyware tools use them, see "Spam Blockers" at www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1514410,00.asp.

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ANTI-SPYWARE SPYWARE

Getting rid of spyware is easy – just run a spyware removal program – or is it?

A recent article in ZDNet News points out that some removal programs then plant spyware of their own. One such program against which complaints have been made is SpyBan. Here's what ZDNet had to say:

One such tool facing allegations of abuse is SpyBan, an anti-spyware program that has been downloaded some 44,000 times in the last four months, according to Download.com, a software download site owned by CNET Networks, the publisher of News.com. Download.com removed the software this week, noting that SpyBan had failed to disclose and explain all the software components included in its installation, a violation of the Web site's policies. ...

Numerous competing anti-spyware companies, including Spybot-Search & Destroy parent PepiMK Software and Sweden-based Kephyr.com, have identified SpyBan as a potential source of unwanted spyware – notably a program listed by many spyware cleaners as Look2Me. Download.com had also independently warned that Look2Me might be installed along with SpyBan. ...

"Look2Me is a spyware program that monitors visited Web sites and submits the logged information to a server," Symantec reports on its Web site. According to PestPatrol, Look2Me is categorized as "software that brings ads to your computer. Such ads may or may not be targeted."

The complaints seem to have had an effect, as SpyBan appears to be no longer available. If you have installed it, get hold of Lavasoft's Ad-aware or SpyBot and remove it.

<http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware>

<http://www.safer-networking.org/>

Good spyware removal programs rely on databases of information about the spyware that is to be removed. Make sure that the database is up-to-date by updating it before trying to clean your computer. Even then, you may need to run more than one such spyware removal program to be sure that you have removed all spyware from your computer.

Note: Most spyware removal programs also remove some or all of your cookies. Removing cookies may mean that you have to re-register to visit some websites.

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MICROSOFT TACKLES SPYWARE

Deceptive software, also known as spyware, now accounts for more than 50 percent of the Windows failures reported to Microsoft and is becoming an important industry concern. Microsoft's partners report that spyware is the number-one support problem and is costing the industry millions of dollars a year in support costs.

Earlier this week, Microsoft and other companies detailed to the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) the steps they're taking to reduce the threat and problems spyware causes. The FTC, which has received many complaints about spyware, is working on a policy for combating deceptive software. At the FTC Spyware Workshop held this week in Washington, D.C., Microsoft presented its anti-spyware efforts, which include consumer education, technology, and the publication of industry best practices.

The company is hoping to avoid what it calls first-response legislation, which it believes won't do a good enough job to thwart the distribution of deceptive software. The use of spyware has increased recently because the programs are being bundled with popular shareware software or are downloaded with unsolicited junk email.

Most spyware is just a nuisance for users; it can change a computer's home page and generate random pop-up ads. But some versions of spyware perform dangerous operations, such as dialling toll numbers and using other illegal methods to capture user information.

Microsoft's new anti-spyware tools include features in the upcoming Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2) and offerings from MSN. The new SP2 features will include [when it is eventually released] a pop-up ad blocker for Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE), a new IE toolbar that will suppress unsolicited software downloads, a redesigned download experience that will make software identification easier, and improved security tools for viewing and controlling browser add-on programs. ...

Microsoft also recently launched a website that provides information about how to avoid and remove deceptive software. The site lists the following five tips you can take to avoid spyware:

- choose an appropriate web browser security setting
- don't accept downloads from strangers
- look for signs of deceptive software on your computer
- detect and remove unwanted software
- keep Windows up-to-date

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WHAT ARE THEY?

From Paul Turvey:

Working as a computer instructor for an adult-education program at a community college, I am keenly aware of the gap in computer knowledge between my younger and older students.

My observations were confirmed the day a new student walked into our library area and glanced at the encyclopedia volumes stacked on a bookshelf.

"What are all these books?" he asked. Somewhat surprised, I replied that they were encyclopedias. "Really?" he said. "Someone printed out the whole thing?"

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GOOD BUY

Memory prices, especially DDR, have been moving up lately, but other components remain good value. However, the dollar seems to have weakened a little. If that trend continues, component prices will firm. Now might be a good time to buy that new drive or video card.

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