

## **"Viruses, Viruses & More Viruses"**

Well 2004 has just begun and already PC users everywhere have been bombarded with a new threat that is supposedly bigger than all that preceded it. The My Doom (a.k.a. Norvag) worm has been spreading around the world via email and humble PC users are left to try and defend themselves from another attack on their daily work and social usage as well as their privacy. Is this worm really that destructive compared to others? If the media didn't hype it up would the average home or small business user even need to be aware that such a bug exists as long as they continue to take their regular proper precautions?

There are over 65,000 computer viruses and counting and just like human afflictions it is not practical that we are made aware of them all, provided that we are taking the proper safety measures for our given situation. The people that create these bugs are very clever individuals and if they really wanted to access your computer or network, given that you are connected to some sort of network like the Internet, they could because even institutions as sophisticated as the U.S. military have not been immune from hacker activity. However the average business or home user would probably not be exposed to such activity and the vulnerabilities that worms such as My Doom create will most likely cause performance, annoyance and invasion of privacy issues.

Preventative maintenance is the best bet to ensure that your business or home is not exposed to the ongoing threats that these sorts of bugs can cause. It is essential for every PC and server to have anti-virus software that is up to date and preferably one that automatically updates when you connect to the Internet. Ideally every single computer (or network) that connects to the Internet should have an internal or external firewall to best prevent general unauthorised access to your computer or network. A firewall is essential for businesses and for any user with a broadband Internet connection. Ensure that if you have sensitive and important data that you have appropriate periodic backup systems in place. A final tip is not to open any email attachments unless you are totally confident of the source of the email and also the attachment in question. Most anti-virus products have email scanners which prevent you from opening infected email attachments. A consultation with your local computer consultant could help put your mind at ease.

As a side note we often get asked where viruses and worms get their names. They come from a variety of sources including recent meals of a virus analyst, embedded code within a virus, local strippers, in reference to their creator, words spelt backwards or sometimes just a appropriate word at the time.

### **Monthly tip**

If you use the file-sharing program Kazaa, remove it from your system and then download and use Kazaa Lite. Kazaa comes with a lot of add-ons called spy-ware and ad-ware which can harm system performance and cause other problems. Kazaa Lite is exactly the same program from a user perspective but without the unwanted add-ons.

### **Gripe of the month**

As with the telecommunications industry, broadband Internet is now being offered by numerous Internet Service Providers (ISPs) thus lowering the cost to consumers. Many of the larger providers dazzle the eye with low introductory rates or seemingly high download limits. However this is offset by long contract agreements, increased monthly payments after the introductory period, high penalty rates for exceeding download limits or breaking contracts and loss of speed once limits reach a certain point. There are good deals if do your research with many of the smaller providers. Also very few ISPs notify their customers of the need for increased protection like firewalls.

### **Value Product of the month**

USB Flash Memory – This simple little device that is the size of a car key and just as light can depending on the capacity hold between 50 to 1400 times as much information as a standard floppy disk. It is great for simple backups and transfer of information like PowerPoint presentations while sitting comfortably on your key chain, around your neck or in your pocket.

128MB USB Flash Memory: RRP \$80 - \$100

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