

LRDC Computing Services

Computing Services Newsletter

Summer 2001

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Spam: Electronic Junk Mail

by Jo-Anne Krevy

Spam is generally defined as unsolicited and unwanted e-mail messages, the electronic equivalent of junk mail, and is indeed named after Hormel's famous spiced ham in a can. These e-mail messages were likely dubbed "spam" because they are as undesirable as ham in a can. Spam's purpose can be to sell goods or services (legitimate or not), advertise money-making schemes, solicit opinions, harass, or advertise web sites. Spamming is considered bad netiquette and unethical because it wastes time and money.



Although they are a nuisance and still considered junk mail, e-mail messages, newsletters, and advertisements from legitimate businesses to whom you gave your e-mail address are not considered spam. If you receive such e-mail, there should be instructions for unsubscribing at the bottom of the message. Chain letters claiming you or a sick child will receive money for each e-mail message sent can also be annoying, but the sender is probably just an innocent victim of a hoax. A polite reply to the sender advising them of the hoax and requesting they not send you such e-mail in the future is usually an appropriate response.

Spam, by comparison, is deliberately sent and is costly. Spammers often conceal their identities and use Internet Service Providers' (ISPs) equipment, storage, and resources; most of these costs are then passed down to subscribers. Undeliverable e-mail also fills network and disk space, increasing Internet traffic and congestion. ISP's are subject to complaints from irate recipients who conclude that since the ISP delivered the mail, they must be an "accomplice to the crime," thus tainting the ISP's reputation.

In 1996, AOL's court injunction stopped the receipt of more than 1.9 million spam e-mail messages per day from Cyber Promotions, Inc. In AOL's case, subscribers spent an

estimated 5,200 hours per day reading/deleting spam. This doesn't even include the time spent to create e-mail filters and/or to complain to ISP administrators.

What You Can Do

- *Never respond to an unsolicited e-mail message.* Responding to spam verifies the e-mail has reached a "real person." The spammer can use this information either to continue sending you spam (possibly under different aliases), or sell your e-mail address to other spammers or even legitimate businesses.
- *Never sign up with sites that promise to remove your name from spam lists.* There are two kinds of these sites: sincere sites and spam address collectors. A sincere site is ignored (or exploited) by the spammers, and the second type of site is owned by them. In either case, sending an e-mail only verifies your e-mail address.
- *Take meaningful action to stop spammers.* You can filter messages, write to government representatives, and even report spam.

How to Report Spam

Forward spam to Spamcop, a free service that works directly with network administrators to help stop spam messages. Pitt's Computing Services and Systems Development Department (CSSD) uses this service. Unwanted messages can be reported directly to Spamcop by following the directions in the box below. *Note: spam must be reported within three days of receipt.*

Spamcop Directions

To register with Spamcop:

- Open the URL, <http://spamcop.net> in your web browser.
- Click on the link that says **Free Reporting Service**.
- Enter your e-mail address in the appropriate block and click **Verify Email Address**.
- An e-mail will be sent to you with an authorization URL – save this URL.

To report individual e-mail messages:

- Open and copy the message with full headers to your clipboard. The full, unmodified header will need to be sent (click the *Blah, blah, blah* button in Eudora to expand the full header).
- Go to the authorization URL and paste the entire message into the box.
- Click **Process SPAM**.
- After a short wait, click **Send Spam Report Now**.

Additional sources of information are available on-line at www.emailabuse.org and www.abuse.net. Please contact Computing Services for help filtering and/or reporting spam, or unsubscribing to legitimate electronic mailing lists.

Norton AntiVirus to Protect University of Pittsburgh

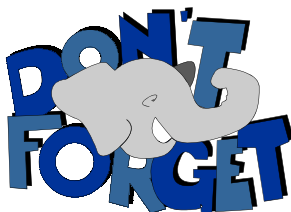
by Shari Kubitz

On May 31, CSSD announced an agreement with Symantec to provide antivirus software to the University community. In addition to Norton AntiVirus, Symantec is well known for its system utilities (Norton Utilities and Norton System Works) as well as its other Internet security products. Most recently, the University had licensed antivirus software through McAfee (Viruscan for PCs and Virex for Macs).

Symantec's Norton AntiVirus, a leading antivirus software package, can be configured through its LiveUpdate feature to automatically update your virus definitions as needed whenever your computer is connected to the Internet. This reduces the amount of time it takes for your computer to be protected from new and emerging virus threats. Since McAfee provides weekly updates for PCs and monthly updates for Macs, if a serious threat occurs between weekly (or monthly) updates, McAfee users need to download and install special data files for particular viruses.

Norton AntiVirus should run more smoothly, and require less maintenance on your part and the part of your project representative. Certified updates will be downloaded directly from Symantec (as opposed to the LRDC file servers and web site) and will run entirely in the background. Other features include automatic scanning of e-mail attachments and downloaded files. Remember, although these files are scanned, they only offer protection against viruses that have been discovered and added to the virus definitions; it is still important to use caution when you receive attachments (see article on next page) and to periodically verify that your definitions are up-to-date.

Students from LRDC Computing Services are in the process of removing McAfee Viruscan from all LRDC computers and installing Norton AntiVirus. If you have a University-licensed copy of McAfee Viruscan or Virex on your home computer, you are also required to remove it. Under the license with Symantec, you can download a free copy of Norton AntiVirus software for your home computer from www.technology.pitt.edu/software/index.html#faculty. Installation instructions are available for anyone who needs them, and we have CDs available to lend for home installations. If you have any questions, please contact Shari Kubitz at x4-2881.






On July 12, you will be required to dial 10-digit phone numbers (area code + 7-digit phone number) for all local 412 and 724 area codes. Also on July 12, campus phones will require dialing "9" to get an outside line instead of "9-1." These changes also affect auto-dials programmed on home computers, laptops, fax machines, cell phones, etc.

You may use either dialing method until then—so ***we strongly recommend reprogramming any such device before July 12.*** If you need assistance call Computing Services at x4-7033.

Infected Attachments Often Carry Red Flags

by Shari Kubitz

In the past, computer users were taught to use caution when opening attachments from senders they did not know. Ironically, now, some of the greatest virus threats are most likely to arrive in your mailbox from someone you know – a friend, relative, colleague, or supervisor. This is due to the fact that a new breed of viruses is designed to spread via e-mail from the infected computer's address book. It could come in the form of a joke, a picture, or an important memo. While you should be particularly suspicious of unsolicited attachments, the following are a few red flags to look out for:

- ☒ Many new viruses are spread through attachments with VBS and EXE extensions (these icon looks like:  ,  , and ).
- ☒ The e-mail comes from an unknown user and tries to entice you to open a file. For example, viruses sent from "Hahaha" have been appearing in many mailboxes at LRDC and try to encourage you to open an attached graphic. When opened, a virus is executed that affects your computer and potentially the computers of all those in your e-mail address book.
- ☒ The e-mail comes from someone you know and tries to entice you to open a file, but does not have a signed personal message. While there may be a signature, it would be the default signature that appears in all the sender's e-mail. Without a separate signed note, use caution.
- ☒ The e-mail seems out of character. For example, you receive an e-mail message entitled "I love you" from a casual acquaintance.
- ☒ A document contains a script or macro. When opening a file, if you are asked whether to enable macros, be sure to verify with the sender that a legitimate script was embedded.

The following are a few suggestions that may make it easier to rule out a virus:

- ☒ **Verify.** If you have any doubts as to the legitimacy of the e-mail/attachment(s), call or e-mail the sender for verification.
- ☒ **Ask LRDC Computing Services for help.** Don't hesitate to call LRDC Computing Services (x4-7033) for assistance. You can also forward the suspicious message to skubitz@pitt.edu for evaluation.
- ☒ **When sending attachments, mention in the body of the message how many attachments you are sending and what they contain.** Viruses often contain generic messages, such as "This is the file you asked for." Adding your name, (for example, "This is the file you asked for – Shari"), will make it clear to the recipient that you intended to send the attachment.

Mac OS X: Apple's Operating System of the Future

by Karen Bassett and Eric Fussenegger

When Apple first introduced its graphical user interface (GUI) operating system in 1984, it was a radical change from booting your computer to a command prompt. The latest operating system, Mac OS X, is another huge leap. Unlike the transition from previous systems – a few enhancements and improved stability – Mac OS X has a much different look and feel, complete with animation, and transparent windows and menus. The biggest buzz is that Mac OS X runs on BSD Unix. Ironically, the biggest technological advancement is an old one – the command line. For those familiar with Unix, you can boot directly to a Unix prompt, type Unix commands, and run Unix applications. Unix is a very powerful, very stable, multi-user operating system. Mac OS X benefits from Unix features such as protected memory, true multitasking, and advanced file permission security.

With Unix as its underpinnings, Mac OS X should prove to be more stable than past operating systems. System extensions and control panels are eliminated, which will reduce crashes due to extension conflicts. Protected memory adds stability by giving applications access only to their assigned space in memory. This reduces crashes due to applications accessing memory being used by other applications; when one application crashes, the rest of the system keeps working. Another change in memory management is that OS X allocates memory as needed for virtual memory and to all native OS X programs, thus eliminating the need for manually adjusting memory. Mac OS X should also prove to be a faster system when running native OS X applications, due to true multitasking and better use of dual processors.

Mac users will notice changes to file permission security as soon as they boot into OS X – all users, including the owner, must log in with a username and password before gaining access to the hard drive. Giving others access to your Mac by setting up users and groups for file sharing is also a bit different, since it is now based on Unix file permissions.

The most noticeable difference is Aqua, Apple's new interface. The aqua interface has brightly colored, animated buttons and icons. Transparent menus and windows that fade away give the desktop a three-dimensional feel. A traffic light at the top of each window replaces the maximize, minimize, and close buttons. All Mac OS X text is antialiased, with smooth edges that are much easier to read.

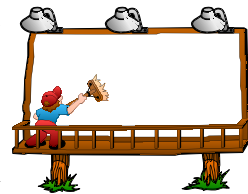
Although Aqua represents a major design change, it is still recognizably Macintosh. Some menus and applications have been updated. The Apple menu gives you access to System Preferences, which replaces Control Panels. The Chooser is gone, since Mac OS X is TCP/IP based. The new Go menu gives you access to recently used folders and network servers. The Special menu is also gone, moving functions like Restart and Shutdown to the updated Apple menu. The Dock, designed to be the control center, replaces the control strip, launcher, and Applications menu. The Dock displays the contents of open windows, folders, applications, and documents – even links to web sites. Clicking on an item in the Dock automatically opens its window. To permanently add an application to the Dock, you can simply drag the icon into the Dock. The trash can is also relocated to the Dock.

More adventurous users might be tempted to upgrade immediately. However, there are several important considerations. Software companies must develop OS X-native versions before you can truly realize the benefits of OS X. While Classic Mode allows OS X to run older Mac applications, most run extremely slow compared to OS 9. FileMaker Pro was one of the first companies to release a native OS X version, but it has known incompatibilities. Eudora and Internet Explorer have beta versions available. Microsoft plans to release Office this Fall. Macromedia, Netscape, and Symantec have not announced release dates.

Hardware requirements specify a Macintosh G3 or G4 (upgrade cards are not supported) with at least 128 MB of RAM. However, to run more than a few applications at once, 256 MB of RAM is needed. Mac OS X also lacks native hardware drivers for many peripherals including printers, scanners, CD and DVD drives, cameras, and video capture cards. Our advice is to wait until more Mac OS X-native applications and drivers are developed to make your transition to the new operating system as smooth as possible. The good news is Apple is still giving you the choice – new systems are shipping with both Mac OS 9.1 and OS X. The educational price for Mac OS X is \$69.00, and it also includes a copy of OS 9.1.

Computing Services Staff Update

Tim Cooper recently accepted a position in the Bioengineering department as a systems administrator. We wish him the best of luck. We're pleased to announce Tim's replacement, Jo-Anne Krevy. In April, she graduated with a B.S. in Information Science. She has been with LRDC for more than 9 years, most recently as the project coordinator for Walt Schneider's Brain Imaging project. Jo-Anne brings web design and software skills from her course work and previous position. She is currently working on a prototype to re-design the Philosophy department's web site. She is looking forward to helping people create posters and presentations, and solve computer problems. Jo-Anne has also taken over Kim Flotta's role in providing new user orientation sessions. Kim, who had been working 20% for Computing Services, will now spend 100% of her time with NetLearn. While Kim has always enjoyed helping users, her joint position was becoming increasingly difficult as video editing demands grew as fast as her skills. Kim moved down the hall to room 522; her new phone number is x4-9583.



Computing Services Staff Roster

Karen Bassett, Manager	Room 508A, x4-7037
Gary Wilde, Manager	Room 506A, x4-7042
Eric Fussenegger, Systems Analyst	Room 507, x4-7060
Jo-Anne Krevy, Systems Analyst	Room 507, x4-7060
Shari Kubitz, Systems Analyst	Room 504, x4-2881
Student Operators	Room 506, x4-7033

