

Our Web Page is up!

The Smarts On Site web page is now up and running. We took an approach that strives to not only inform people about our services, but to provide some general computing information as well. For example, do you know the difference between a Virus a Worm and a Trojan? Perhaps you don't even WANT to know, but we put it on our site because the mainstream media just doesn't get it and their stories can generate more fear because they get the facts wrong.

Like all web pages it is a work in progress, improvements will be made when they are needed, and we're not adverse to any useful constructive criticism, so drop on by and have a look around.

This issue...

The Internet is a wonderful thing, but to many it is a place where computer viruses, worms, and Trojans lurk; waiting to infect their PC, and on an unprotected PC this fear is certainly well founded. Recently, at a customers site, we connected a newly upgraded Windows 2000 PC to the Internet and within a half a minute Internet Explorer was popping up unmentionable web-sites,... DOZENS of them! The PC had a firewall on it but the firewall had been mysteriously deactivated.

Never one to let an opportunity like this pass me by I decided to make this issue of the Smart Sheet about viruses and their ilk.

SPAM, aside from being a luncheon meat, is also a term used for unwanted commercial email. Did you know that there are vast networks of "SPAM Zombies" which are used to send these emails? A SPAM Zombie is a PC, perhaps YOUR PC, which has been infected by a viral agent that allows the machine to be controlled remotely. To help keep your PC from becoming a SPAM Zombie here are a few things that you can do;

- Install a good anti virus program. Fsecure (www.fsecure.com) or Norton Anti Virus are both good.
- If you're running Windows make sure you have ALL of the latest service packs installed.
- Running Linux? Viruses are not really a problem, but you may still have security issues. Make sure your web browser is kept up to date. Visit the web-site of your distribution (Mandrake, SuSe, red Hat, etc.) to check for security alerts.
- Put your PC behind a firewall.
- Regularly run Spyware and Adware removal software.
- Avoid "free" programs which use advertising to support them.
- Avoid cheat-sites for games.

The above is by no means a comprehensive list, but implementing any three will go a long way to keeping your computing experience less stressful and more productive.

Make older PCs useful!

It seems like the personal computer is in constant state of requiring an upgrade. Not that there is anything wrong with the hardware mind you, these upgrades are usually driven by the operating system and the applications or games that run on it. The demand for newer, faster more expensive hardware seems to be never-ending. We're always spending more money, buying the latest, faster whiz-bangiest hardware.

Stop and take a breath, because there are alternatives, and get this, they're **inexpensive** alternatives.

Try to run XP on an old Pentium II 233 with 160 Megabytes of RAM.. sure it might run... well, CRAWL might be a better description. Bottom line is that it's simply NOT going to be useful. Windows 98 would run OK, but then to connect to the Internet and remain safe you have to install a firewall and virus software, and forget using some of the latest USB goodies. Want to connect to high speed? More specialized software needs to be installed from the high speed Internet Service Providers. There is an alternative Operating System that will make such an old PC useful again, and it's name is Linux. Linux can save YOU money because you don't need to buy another new PC. Linux is not susceptible to viruses like Windows is, which is one more headache gone, and software for Linux is usually low-cost or no-cost. To learn more send an email to sbungay@mail.smartsonsite.com.

Don't open that JPG!!

There was a time, not too long ago (last week (Sept 12-18 2004)) when I would have told you that you can not get a virus from opening a JPG picture file. Unfortunately with Windows™ that is no longer the case. On Tuesday Sept 21st 2004 Microsoft™ announced a critical vulnerability in the way its software handles JPEG files.

The security hole allows an attacker to create a JPEG file that would take control of a victim's machine when the user uses Internet Explorer, Outlook, Word, and third party applications that rely on Microsoft™ software to decode and view the file. Such malicious picture files could be on a web site, in an email or embedded in a Word document.

The systems affected are Windows XP, Windows Server 2003 and Office XP, however older versions of Windows™ are affected if other Microsoft applications that use the same flawed code have been installed. Windows™ XP™ Service Pack 2 does not contain the security vulnerability but MS Office running on Windows™ XP™ can still be attacked if patches to MS Office have not been applied. The patches are available from the Microsoft™ website.

Mozilla Upgrade advisory...

Security exploits of picture file formats seems to be a problem all over. Users of the Mozilla web browser are advised to bring their browser up to date by visiting the Mozilla web site (www.mozilla.org) and downloading and installing the latest version. It seems that an exploit using the PNG (Portable Network Graphic) format was discovered and patched in August of 2004. The PNG format, while not as prevalent on the web as JPG files poses much less a risk. Still, better safe than sorry. Go get the upgrade and apply it... the computer you save could be your own.

A new virus every hour...

Not to be a gloomy guss but while we're on the topic of security holes and such I can't put enough stress on the importance of being vigilant. Viruses, Trojans and computer worms are not just annoyances, these are tools used by unscrupulous individuals to tunnel for personal information for the purposes of identity theft or to create networks of what have become known as "SPAM Zombies". Trojans that have tons of features but also log every keystroke you make can expose your personal tax information (ever do your taxes on line?) and banking information.

From the Symantec Threat Report, a document which plots historical virus trends, the average time from a vulnerability being discovered to someone exploiting it is now just 5.8 days. Some 40 per cent of Fortune 100 companies had been infected with worms over a period of six months. There were 4,496 new Microsoft Windows viruses discovered in six months, or an average of 24 new viruses every day. Basically, the epidemic is out of control.

Computer distress?

Send an SOS!

Call Smarts On Site!

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