

Information Technology

How Virus Writers Spent Their Summer

Ah, summertime! Trips to the beach or the mountains, enjoying picnics, or just sippin' Margaritas – they're all glorious.

While the rest of us try to slow down a bit during the summer, the social misfits who create computer viruses work overtime. In 1999, it was "Melissa"; in 2000, it was "I Love You". The summer of 2001 brought four: "Code Red", "Code Blue", "Sircam" and "Nimda". The cost of cleaning up the messes was estimated to be around \$4-6 billion worldwide. Are you prepared for the time and cost of disinfecting your computers or recovering lost data?

Small and mid-sized organizations are in a bind: large organizations have staffs to handle computer security, and very small (fewer than 5 computers) organizations can update anti-virus software in an hour or two, but companies with 5 – 50 computers have no easy answer. They can't rely on users to update anti-virus software regularly (they won't do it), and there's no in-house computer staff. Are there any answers?

Here are steps small and mid-sized organizations can take:

- First and foremost, back up regularly. Vital data should be stored on a file server and backed up daily. Tape is cheap; data is expensive.
- Use anti-virus products which offer a corporate edition to ease the task of updating multiple computers. For example, the Corporate edition of Norton Anti-virus is installed on a server as well as client computers. After updating itself, the master copy updates the copies on the clients, so users don't have to. (Unfortunately, remedies for the latest viruses and worms often require a small program to be installed and run on each computer, a procedure not handled by the anti-virus update process. If the client computers are running Windows 2000 or XP, an administrator can log on to each client and install the virus killer without having to visit each one. It's possible but more difficult to do this with Windows 95-8 and Me, so you'll probably have to go to each computer.)
- Make sure that Windows security fixes are installed promptly on all computers. As with the virus-killers, it's a challenge to do this in a large network, but Microsoft and others have tools to aid this process.

Let's make next summer virus-free. Margarita, anyone?

Suggestions for future topics are always welcome; e-mail me at denis@maclamor.com.

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