What's Sneaking Into Your Computer?

New types of insidious programs called "spyware" are burrowing into PCs, wreaking all sorts of problems. These small programs install themselves on computers to serve up advertising, monitor web surfing and other computer activities, and carry out other orders – and they are quickly replacing spam as the online annoyance computer users most complain about.

While malicious hackers are spreading viruses all over the global computer network, advertisers and scam artists are propagating other pests that are arguably even more annoying. The spyware implications for consumers are only beginning to be felt.

Computer security experts say there are nearly 1,000 forms of spyware. Most have what proponents argue is a legitimate purpose – delivering ads specifically targeted to a user's online behavior. But even this is maddening for most consumers, judging by the numbers of those who choose to expunge such programs from their computers and don't want to be bombarded with yet more advertisements.

Even worse are those that can snatch passwords, credit card numbers, and run other online scams. These include "key loggers" that record every tap on the keyboard, and "dialers" that instruct modems to dial premium-rate numbers, running up phone-bill charges for unwitting computer users.

Some spyware programs reset browser home pages, while others redirect search requests. Some can slow a computer's performance to a crawl by hogging its memory.

Software has long had some of these capabilities. For years, websites have installed "cookies" on visitors' computers. These small files identify repeat visits and generally serve what many consumers consider a useful purpose by eliminating the need to register every time, for example, or by generating suggestions based on past purchases.

WIRELESS SERVICE AREAS

Service is currently available in . . .
- Porterville
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- Strathmore
- Terra Bella
- Lindsay
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more coming soon!

Virus Attacks Mac OSX

Thanks to Apple Computer's rising star in the world of digital music, Mac OSX has become a target for malware authors.

A Trojan horse, called MP3Concept or MP3Virus.gen, has been discovered that masquerades as an MP3 file. It becomes activated when unwary users click on it, expecting to play a digital song.

Mac users have long prided themselves on running a system that has been largely virus-free. Few Mac OSX users run antivirus software, or are wary of double-clicking files they've downloaded or received via email. But that could change quickly. All operating systems are susceptible to malicious code, just as Windows is. Macs just haven't been targeted – until now.

- **VIRUSES STOPPED BY OCS SYSTEM: 769,624** (2,000 daily)
- **SPAM BLOCKED BY OCS SYSTEM: 16,256,359** (50,000 daily)

Legal Music Download Services

In the wake of all the brouhaha regarding illegal music file sharing over the Internet, several legitimate RIAA-approved fee-based services have emerged. These are the top four according to CNET, with their review summaries and ratings:

iTunes
APPLE.COM
Mac / Win

Editor's Choice. No-risk service, reasonable pricing, flexible usage rights – an interface that makes buying music fun. (*8.6:Very Good*)

Rhapsody
LISTEN.COM
Web

This subscription service gracefully reconciles the demands of the labels with the needs of music aficionados. (*8.0:Very Good*)

Napster
NAPSTER.COM
Win

While not as elegant as iTunes, Napster 2.0 has a deeper catalog and helpful ways to discover new music. (*6.7:Fair*)

BuyMusic
BUYMUSIC.COM
Web

This Windows-friendly iTunes imitator can't match the simplicity of the original. (*6.3:Fair*)

Spyware *(continued from Side One)*

Spyware, by contrast, is a much more powerful tracking technology, capable of monitoring a computer user's every move online. The same capabilities that make it more worrisome from a privacy standpoint make it a powerful tool for targeting ads.

Politicians are taking up the cause. Utah's governor last month signed into law the Spyware Control Act, the first such state law, with fines of up to $10,000 per violation. It's not clear how effective this effort will be – it has been criticized as being both toothless and as an onerous burden even on legitimate software companies. Opponents may also challenge it on the basis that it effectively seeks to regulate Internet commerce beyond state borders.

So what can you do about it? For starters, simply continue following all the normal precautions. Don't click on popups or attachments you don't recognize or expect to receive. You can also increase your browser's security level, enable your free OCS firewall (in UserAdmin), or run a firewall utility on your computer.

You should also be running local virus protection on your computer, in addition to that provided by OCS (*see also our February 2004 newsletter*). Products are available from Norton, McAfee, and Trend Micro, and there are spyware-specific utilities like Spybot, Spychecker, AdAware, and others.

Or, we can plug you into the same system we use internally at OCS, which protects all of our networked computers automatically, both at office and home. Click "OCS OfficeScan" on our home page for more information.

Portions of this article from The Wall Street Journal.

NATIONWIDE OCS SERVICE for
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With over 2,500 free local access numbers across the country, you can keep quality OCS dialup service when you travel or even if you move. Or recommend it to your friends, family, and business associates across the country and earn referral credits at the same time! To check for available numbers in different areas of the country, just click "Nationwide Numbers" or "Access Numbers" on our website. New accounts may sign up using the handy "Subscribe Online" procedure on our home page. Call us for more information!

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• Long Distance Calling at Low Flat Rates
• Personal and Automated Answering Controls
• Music and Messaging On Hold
• Conference and 3-Way Calling
• Voice Mail (with custom messaging) and Voice-to-Email
• Link Branch Locations as Extensions (no measured usage)
• Support Roaming Users with Find/Follow and Remote Access
• Usage Logs with Accounting and Authorization Codes
• Station-to-Station Intercom and Speed Dial
• Caller ID, Hold, Transfer, and Forward
• Call Notify, Return, and Do Not Disturb
• Call Plans and Hunt Groups
• Call Park and Pick-Up
• And much more!

OACYS INTERNET SERVICE PLANS

| Plan Name | Average Speeds | | | B-M-W[1] | One-Time Fees | | | Monthly Service |
	Min	Typ	Max		Service Activation	Install/ Configure	Equipment Deposit	
1 Bandwidth-Mailboxes-Webspace (see notes)								
DIALUP	26K	40K	53K	1-5-5	25.00	-	-	24.95
Accelerator	Typically 2-5X faster			-	-	-	-	+5.00
WIRELESS | STANDARD 2.4 GHz								
24 Basic	125K	500K	750K	10-5-5	25.00	100.00	200.00	49.95[2]
24 Premium	250K	1M	1.5M	15-5-5	25.00	100.00	200.00	79.95[2]
24 Business	375K	1.5M	2M	20-10-10	25.00	100.00	200.00	129.95[2]

[2] Add $10 per month for locations beyond 5 miles from nearest tower

WIRELESS | SPECIAL CASES 900 MHz								
900 Basic	125K	375K	750K	5-5-5	25.00	100.00	200.00	59.95

For special cases where obstacles prevent normal service. Please call or see our website for more information.

WIRELESS | MISSION CRITICAL 5.8 GHz								
58 Business	500K	2M	3M	25-25-25	25.00	200.00	500.00	159.95
58 Corporate	750K	3M	4M	30-30-30	25.00	200.00	500.00	199.95
58 Enterprise	1M	4M	5M	40-40-40	25.00	200.00	500.00	249.95

HI-CAP   Please call to enquire about fractional and dedicated T1 circuits.

Notes. Locations beyond 5 miles add $10 per month. All plans include automated central email virus scanning, email spam filtering, and website parental controls. All plans except Wireless 24 Basic and 900 Special include supplementary dialup account. Bandwidth caps are in GB per month, see AUP. Dialup, Wireless 24 Basic and Premium, and 900 Special plans may use webspace for non-commercial purposes only. Wireless installation and deposit package may be paid in three installments upon request. All speeds are symmetrical (same for upload and download) within the OACYS network only. All plans terminate at OACYS Porterville headquarters and transport to the Internet via dual T3s over dedicated OC12 fiber optic circuit. This is not a quote, all information is subject to change without notice. Pricing and terms are current at the date of this newsletter and supersede previous versions. Please check with our office for additional detail regarding any of our Internet service plans.

I Didn't Know That!

OCS provides "A-to-Z" computer technology services:

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