

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

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The 90# hoax

In the United States some business telephone systems require the user to dial '9' for an outside line. On some of the older ones, it is possible to transfer someone ringing in from outside to that outside line, although modern systems don't permit that.

From that grain of truth, a persistent email hoax has sprung, claiming that if someone rings you on your home phone, or mobile, and asks you to dial '90#' and then hang up, that person will then be able to make calls and have them charged to your account.

In the messages currently circulating, the claim is made that "This could be costly. This has been confirmed by Telstra." and poor old Detective Senior Constable Cooper gets a mention including what purports to be his phone number. However, if you do a Google search, you will find that this particular hoax has been around for at least six years and, back in 1993, DSC Cooper had to put his number onto voicemail to get away from the flood of calls. The number is now no longer connected.

My advice: Don't forward messages to anybody without first checking the facts. The originators of these hoaxes send them out hoping to clog email systems and forwarding them helps these nasty little creeps achieve their objectives.

A reference I found on Hoax Slayer will give you some more background, including what a Telstra spokeswoman really had to say about dialing '90#':

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/06/30/1056825335277.html>

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Where did the HTML go?

Last issue I switched from providing an HTML version of this newsletter to just providing a notification when the PDF

version was made available on our website. This resulted in one reader advising me that he was "[n]ot keen on having the newsletter only on website. It means we have to copy & paste to another folder in order to read it offline at leisure, whereas previously I could keep it in my inbox for as long as necessary." That was his solution to getting the newsletter, but there are others, which I will come to in a minute. But first let me extol the virtues of the PDF version:

Firstly it is easy for me to produce. I write the newsletter using StarOffice 8.0 (currently in beta, but due for release in July). To produce the PDF file, I have only to click on a button in the top menu and then click Export. Job done. Secondly, a PDF file retains the layout I designed. That means that pages can be numbered, columns and illustrations can be used (although they currently aren't), and the end result can readily be printed by those who wish to file the newsletters for later reference. So, how do you deal with the PDF newsletter when you receive notification that it has been published to the website?

With any link to a PDF file on a webpage, you have the option to right-click and choose to "Save target (link)". The actual wording varies with different browsers. Choosing this option will allow you to download the file and store it wherever you wish on the computer.

A second way of handling a PDF document is to open it in your browser and read it online. As the file is in our online archive, you can do this anytime in the foreseeable future. You will need Adobe Reader, or a similar application. As most software and hardware manuals come on CD as PDF files, a PDF reader is a basic piece of kit that every computer user should install as a matter of course. If you don't have one, you can download Adobe Reader from <http://www.adobe.com>. Note that Adobe Reader 7 requires Windows XP. For earlier versions of Windows, you need version 6, or earlier. You can still get these earlier versions from Adobe. Either choose your version of Windows from the drop-down list, or scroll right to the bottom of the screen and follow the archive link.

If you don't want to read it online, open the file in your browser, go to the File menu, and choose "Save as" or "Save a copy" (the wording varies with different versions of Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. Again you can save a copy of the file to anywhere you wish on your computer for reading at your convenience.

And finally, don't forget that you can request that the PDF version be sent to you as an email attachment. We won't send it unless you request it, because we don't want to clog your email box. An overflowing mailbox on your provider's server causes any additional emails received to bounce back to the sender and we wouldn't want you to miss an important email. However, once you have requested that the PDF attachment, we will send it to you automatically until you tell us otherwise.

Note: Eudora users who receive the attachment don't have to do anything to ensure that it is saved to their computer. Eudora stores all attachments in a folder called "Attach" inside the Eudora folder (usually "Program Files\Qualcomm\Eudora"). Users of other email clients may need to take specific action to save the file to the computer. That action will depend on which email client you are using - Thunderbird, Outlook, Outlook Express, AK-Mail, AOL Communicator, Netscape Mail, Mozilla Mail, Barca, Calypso, IncrediMail, Opera, Pegasus Mail, PocoMail, The Bat etc. Check the Help section or the on-disk or online manual.

The HTML version could be reinstated in the future. However, to prepare the HTML version from the word processor file requires the content (called in publishing terms "copy") to be saved in that form. The copy then has to be stripped of any page references, hyperlinks and bookmarks have to be checked and reimplemented where necessary, the format tidied up, and the result pasted into three emails - one to each of the three sections of our (previously HTML) newsletter mailing list. Not a huge amount of work, but it does take time. If you are prepared to do that work for your fellow members, let me know and I'll explain in more detail what has to be done and give you access to the mailing lists. Until someone volunteers to produce the HTML version and mail it out, only the PDF version will be produced.

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Opening .XLS and .DOC files

Many home computers are supplied with the Microsoft Works Suite, some with just MS Works. The Suite includes Word as the word processor (Works does not) and Works spreadsheet and database. It does not include Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which is the application that generates .XLS files. As a result Works Suite will try to open .XLS files in Word. For some purposes this may prove satisfactory, but, as Bill Ryan found, printing the result may not work well.

You could, of course, go out and buy Microsoft Office, but a cheaper solution is to load OpenOffice.org 1.1.4. OpenOffice.org's Calc spreadsheet will open, edit and print .XLS spreadsheets and offers a high degree of compatibility, which will be improved further in the version 2.0, due out sometime in the next few months. In Bill's case, it opened and printed the spreadsheet exactly as its author intended, without Bill have to make any adjustments. By contrast, opening it in Word, required reformatting of the resulting table and amending the printing options, before the table could be printed on a single sheet.

I also found OpenOffice.org to be the solution at my local newsagency for a problem opening Word .DOC email attachments on a computer which did not have Word installed. Windows 98, which the computer is running, tried to open them in WordPad, but then threw an invalid page fault error. As they were not having problems with any other programs, I decided to try OpenOffice.org to handle the email attachments and the little bit of word processing they were doing on the computer and, the last I heard, all was working well.

OpenOffice.org is distributed as open source software and can be obtained from <http://www.openoffice.org> or from magazine discs. It may legally be used in commercial environments as well as by non-profit organisations and private individuals without charge.

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Fire!

Did you see the piece in the "Mercury" the other day, where a house burned down with the cause being attributed to a computer monitor catching fire? There are number of things you can do to prevent the same thing happening to you.

The simplest is to ensure that you never leave a CRT monitor on overnight or when you are away. If you need to leave the computer on, turn the monitor off. That saves power and avoids the fire risk. I call it the "best screen saver".

Make absolutely certain that water leakage from pipes or the roof cannot drip onto the monitor as it can cause a short circuit.

Also make sure your monitor has adequate ventilation and keep in as dust free an environment as possible. When necessary, clean the ventilation holes so that air can flow through the monitor allowing the heat to escape. This will reduce the risk of its overheating. (See the link below for more information on computer cleaning.)

Finally consider replacing your ageing CRT monitor with its flickering, heat and radiation problems with a modern LCD screen. These occupy less space, never flicker, and generate less heat and radiation. 17" LCD monitors are now available for as little as \$365 with a three year warranty and a 7-day zero dead pixel warranty. That last means that the monitor will be replaced if you can find any dead pixels in the first seven days. Not all monitors have such a warranty, so ask about the dead pixel policy before buying an LCD monitor.

<http://www.computerhope.com/cleaning.htm#11>
<http://www.hallmark.com.au>

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Alphabet soup

Computer terminology is an alphabet soup of acronyms, abbreviations and other jargon. Do you know what ACPI, BO2K, CNR, DMA, FOLED, GPS, HPFS, IDE, J2ME, mini-ITX, Ni-MH, OSD, PDA, RTD, SATA, and UPS mean? Which of them do you need to know about?

A good place to start is to put the term that you want explained into your favourite search engine and see what references it finds.

<http://www.google.com.au>
<http://www.dogpile.com>
<http://www.alltheweb.com>

Another good place to find out is:

<http://whatis.techtarget.com>

This Whatis site lists hundreds of terms with links to where explanations can be found. Terms are divided into categories, such as Hardware, Software, Computing Fundamentals and Internet. This makes it easy to zero in on the particular piece of jargon you want to know about. Depending on the source of the definition, some explanations are just a little technical, but, overall, this is well worth bookmarking.

Yet another place to look for explanations is the PC Webopedia.

<http://www.pcwebopedia.com>

Webopedia describes itself as “The only online dictionary and search engine you need for computer and Internet technology definitions”. In addition to definitions of almost any term you can think of, there are useful articles on subjects like “[The Differences and Features of Hardware & Software Firewalls?](#)”, “[Is Your Child's Information Protected Online?](#)”, “[DVD Formats Explained](#)”, and “[Why E-Mails Bounce](#)”. The articles are brief, but cover the essentials and generally they aren't highly technical.

If you are an absolute beginner with no knowledge of computer jargon, then this is the site for you:

http://www.geekgirls.com/absolute_beginners_jargon.htm

Terms are arranged alphabetically and the authors of the website endeavour to explain them in plain English so that even someone with little or no knowledge of computers can understand.

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Quick fix

Many modern motherboards have built-in sound and LAN (network connection). Some have a built-in VGA chip as well. While these built-in chips perform well, especially for entry level computers, there are times when you may want to improve your performance by replacing them with a separate card. For example, you might want to add a high-end sound card, a gigabit LAN card, or the latest graphics card to take advantage of the latest features. But there is another use for such card replacements and that is where the built-in chip stops working or develops an intermittent fault. Unless the fault is covered by warranty, it is costly to replace the motherboard. Instead, if you have the necessary slot spare, install a card. By choosing the card carefully, you may be able to improve performance at the same time.

With sound cards, you may need to turn off the internal chip before installing your new card. This is usually done in the CMOS, although some older motherboards used a jumper on the motherboard itself. You can find out by studying the motherboard manual. If you don't have one, obtain a copy from the manufacturer's website, or try sites such as:

<http://users.iafrica.com/g/g1/glynhall/hohweb/manuals.htm>

<http://motherboards.mbarron.net/reload.html>

If you don't know the make and model of your motherboard, try a program like Everest Home Edition or Belarc Advisor that will attempt to identify it for you. Also inspect the motherboard for identifying numbers that you can use to aid your search.

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