

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

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Your ISP didn't send it!

Yesterday I received two messages from “The Southcom Support Team” with attachments. The first said my email password upgrade had been successful (*email-password.zip* attached) and the second informed me that my email account had been temporarily suspended and invited me to read the attached *readme.zip*. Inside the zip files were “*email-password.htm* ...” and “*readme.txt* ...”. My suspicions were immediately aroused. Why?

- Firstly, the string of spaces followed by “...” showed that there was more to the names. What was being hidden?
- Secondly, there is no such company as “Southcom”. It was “Southern Internet Services” and is now part of Eftel Keypoint.
- Thirdly, Internet Service Providers (ISP) do not send out attachments. If they have a message for you, it is sent in plain text without attachment.
- Fourthly, attachments that are zipped up for no apparent reason are highly suspect, as they can often be an attempt to fool antivirus software.
- Fifthly, I hadn't upgraded my password. My account with Eftel Keypoint exists purely to catch any email sent to an old address. The email is automatically collected by Bigfoot and forwarded to my current address.
- And finally, when read together, the two messages just don't “gel”.

An examination of the names with Xandros' excellent File Manager showed the missing part of the name to be “.exe”. That really set the warning bells jangling! These were executable files disguised to look benign. Only one explanation sprang to mind: The originator was up to no good!

A full scan with Xandros Antivirus saw both attachments quarantined as being infected. Be warned. If your ISP's name, as it appears in your email address, and its company name are the same, such messages might seem a bit more convincing, but **common sense** should tell you **not** to open the attachments.

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\$200 computer?

You go to The Auction Centre at Cambridge (Next one: 6 July 2005 at 6.30 pm), spend \$200, or so, and come home with an IBM NetVista or a Compaq Evo and 17" monitor, stripped of software and operating system. What now?

Check what you have

First off, check the computer's specifications. Many of these auctioned computers are ex-Government or ex-lease. They have been used in network environments and may lack floppy drives, CD-ROMs or modems. These are all inexpensive components and are easy to fit, so the next step is to remedy any hardware deficiencies. You may also want to add some memory, if the computer has less than 256 MB.

Next you need an operating system, if none was included with the computer. The choice here is between Windows and a distribution of Linux. (Many recent sales have included Windows 2000, but needed service packs adding.)

Windows

Windows is the most widely used operating system and Microsoft recommends that you use XP with SP2 and add the latest updates. If you are going to use Windows and the computer you have bought is suitable, you would do well to follow that advice. Microsoft is continually working to improve the security of its products and only by using the latest can you be sure that you have protected yourself against the majority of the malware out there.

Using Windows XP gives you access to the largest catalogue of applications and the biggest pool of people who can help you with problems. The downside is the expense of some of those programs and reported instabilities and shortcomings in the operating system package. See, for example, John Dvorak criticism of Outlook Express in *Inside PC Magazine Online*. (<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1791516,00.asp>) With a huge pool of applications to choose from, however, there is much you can do to overcome any such shortcomings. Just don't limit your thinking ...

In addition to what is in the Windows package, you will need applications to perform the various tasks for which you bought the computer, to protect yourself from malware (viruses, spyware, and spam), to read manuals (often in PDF format), and to deal with unexpected attachments that some people may send you. Here's some free software that will cover those needs:

Office applications:

- OpenOffice.org (at the time of writing the latest version is 1.1.4, but upgrade to 2.0 when it is released);

PDF files:

- Adobe Reader from <http://www.adobe.com> (use version 6 or 7 depending on your version of Windows)

Antivirus software:

- AVG from <http://www.grisoft.com> (look for the free edition and note the conditions of use)
- **And** have your Internet Service Provider scan your email for viruses (if that service is available)

Stop pop-ups, add tabbed browsing, block images, have more page viewing space:

- Mozilla Firefox (set this as your default browser instead of Internet Explorer) from <http://www.mozilla.org>

Block spam:

- Mozilla Thunderbird (replace Outlook Express with this email client) from <http://www.mozilla.org>
- **Or** add Spamfighter Standard to Outlook or Outlook Express (from <http://www.majorgeeks.com>)
- **And** have your Internet Service Provider block spam (if that service is available)

Anti-spyware:

- Ad-aware from <http://www.lavasoftusa.com> (removes spyware)
- Spybot Search and Destroy from <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html>

Graphics and photos:

- XnView from <http://www.xnview.com> (reads hundreds of formats)
- Picasa 2 from <http://www.picasa.com> (organise and retouch digital photos)

Linux

The most popular alternative to Microsoft's Windows for PC-compatible computers is called 'Linux'. There are free versions or you can buy a supported package. Of the free versions, I would suggest SUSE, Fedora Core, Kubuntu (Ubuntu with KDE desktop to more closely resemble Windows), SimplyMEPIS, or Mandriva as being both comprehensive and reasonably easy to install. These are supplied on DVD, on multiple CDs, or can be downloaded from the respective websites. Be prepared for a very long download, even with broadband.

If you do have broadband and are prepared to buy an easy-to-install, supported version of Linux, I recommend Xandros 3.0 from Linux System Labs (http://www.lsl.com.au/product_info.php?products_id=98). This costs around \$135 plus freight and includes the operating system, a CD of applications and a printed manual. They can also supply CDs of most free Linux versions for a small cost, saving you the lengthy download.

The Deluxe package includes Codeweavers Crossover Office which will run many major Windows applications as if they were native Linux ones – e.g. MS Office, Adobe Photoshop, Lotus Notes, QuickBooks (up to 2004), Apple iTunes, Dreamweaver, Internet Explorer.

There is also a comprehensive SurfSafe package, which is slightly dearer than the Deluxe package.

If you want to try Xandros for (almost) free, look for the Open Circulation Edition on magazine discs, or download it from <http://www.xandros.com> (US\$10 unless you use BitTorrent).

Other possibilities are Lycoris and Linspire.

Linux distributions generally include all the extra software that I have mentioned you should add to Windows, or give easy access to it, via the Internet. Because Linux is structured differently from Windows, many malware (malicious software) packages don't cause any problems. Even if Linux is infected, damage is usually limited to the user's folders and does not affect the main system. I use Xandros 3.0 and it now includes antivirus software. So far, that software has not found a single instance of a virus on my Linux drive, although it did pick up a couple of infected attachments in an old (Windows) Eudora folder.

In addition, Xandros includes two readers for PDF files and OpenOffice.org. The Gimp graphics software can be downloaded from their website, as can Firefox and Thunderbird, or you can use the default Mozilla suite.

There are a number of myths about Linux and this piece by Peter Dodwell, published in SCCC's *Bits & Bytes* newsletter's *Penguin Page* (June 2005), lays most of them to rest.

Common myths about Linux

There are a number of reasons which are often cited by Windows users to explain their reluctance to try Linux. In the past, Linux was notoriously difficult to install and use. But this is no longer the case as current users who come to our Linux Group can testify. Past reasons which were once valid, can now be designated as myths.

Myth 1: Linux is hard to install

Modern distributions (a package of applications built around the linux kernel) do a great job of not only identifying hardware, but also creating user space in which they can operate (dual booting). In effect they say “shove over Windows, and give me some room”. Then after installation, they'll present you with a boot menu which enables you to

select which operating system to use. My Xandros will automatically do all of this with just a few mouse clicks. As a technician, I've often had more trouble installing Windows than I have installing Linux. Live CD's such as Knoppix, Suse, and numerous others don't even have to be installed.

Myth 2: It can be difficult to install hardware

While it is true that drivers for many items of hardware are written specifically for Windows, the list of Linux-compatible hardware is growing. However, it may still be necessary to purchase specific hardware which will run under Linux - modems in particular come to mind. In any event, Linux is not alone in this. Many people have had to replace incompatible hardware when upgrading Windows.

Myth 3: Linux is free and therefor lacks support

This myth is readily debunked. Just do a google on Linux Help, and you'll get pages of help sites. The ultimate commercial operating system is Windows. Have you ever tried to get help from Micro\$oft?

Myth 4: Linux is for geeks & gurus, and isn't as easy to use as Windows

Users of Windows are used to and comfortable with a slick graphical interface to access their programs. Many don't know that there are highly professional and easily customized interfaces available; those already familiar with Windows can readily understand and use them.

Myth 5: Linux lacks the range of software that's available for Windows users

It's true that there are many more programs written for Windows. However, the vast majority of users would only use a small fraction of them. There is a Linux equivalent for most programs that the average person would use – word processing, spreadsheets, databases, image editing, photo manipulation, genealogy, sound playing & editing, desktop publishing, web site creation, VOIP (Skype, etc), education, games (Doom, Flight sims, strategy, board, etc), maths, science, etc. Additionally, there are numerous Linux programs which don't have a Windows counterpart. Some have even been ported to Windows so as to add to its repertoire.

Myth 6: I'll have to give up my Windows programs

Years of effort and development have already addressed the myth that moving to Linux means giving up your Windows software. Today, there are plenty of ways to gain the benefit of both. There are programs such as Wine, Crossover Office, [and] Win4Lin for those who simply must run a Windows program. The concern of many seems to be that they'll no longer be able to play their favourite games. Even in this area, there are many Windows games which have been ported to Linux. The dedicated gamer will find much to challenge him/her. When all's said and done, there's always the opportunity to have a dual boot system, and enjoy the best of both worlds.

Major benefits of Linux

In contrast to Windows, Linux offers enhanced performance, stability and security, together with freedom from common viruses. Linux also offers a significant reduction in licensing costs, and gives users the freedom of choice. Contrast this with Windows, where Microsoft wants to dictate how you are allowed to use your computer. I challenge you to do some Internet research on this aspect.

Finally, a tip how to remain totally virus-free. Obtain a Linux compatible modem (if yours isn't), a bootable Linux CD (Knoppix or similar) and a USB flash drive. Boot from your CD and use it to access the net and send/retrieve your emails. Save your settings and anything else you want to the flash drive. When finished, reboot into Windows, scan the flash drive for viruses, and transfer any wanted files into Windows.

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Next meeting

There'll be double value (or double trouble!) at the next meeting with Don Trotman taking on *Picasa 2* and Peter Campbell dealing with *AVG*. Something there for digital camera owners and all those who haven't secured their computer properly. 8.00 pm at the G. A. Wood Hall behind Scots Memorial Church, 29 Bathurst Street on Tuesday, 12 July 2005.

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Annual General Meeting

The AGM is getting close and will be held in August. Meantime there are some vacancies coming up on the Committee. Please consider joining the Committee and helping guide the Group. Even if you can't spare the time – one evening a

month, usually the first Tuesday – please send your suggestions for topics to the Secretary. Your input is valuable. Formal notice of the AGM will be included in a forthcoming issue, but take note now that it will be held on 9 August 2005, unless otherwise notified. Your presence is requested.

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Software PR releases

From time to time we receive PR releases from software companies offering review copies and discounts for members of this group. To take advantage of the review copies, we need reviewers. If you would like to volunteer, you would be most welcome. In exchange for the review copy, we would expect you to provide some feedback about the product. From that you and the editor would develop a review.

However, whether the software is reviewed or not, generally you can claim the discounts, though often the period for which they are available is quite short and may expire soon after the publication of our next newsletter. I therefore propose to post the PR releases directly to our mailing list so that you receive them sooner.

Some examples of the software and discounts available:

- **Bad Guys Use Keyloggers to Get Hold of Your Credit Card Numbers**

Statistics Show That Up to 80% of Home Computers Contain Spyware Programs

Online shopping is becoming increasingly popular. People are buying more goods and services than ever before. Reason? It's convenient. You sit in your favorite armchair and, sipping a cup of hot Nescafe, surf online shops, find the thing you need and order it. You may even have it delivered right to your door. And the only walking you need to do is with your fingers, typing in your credit card numbers. In doing so most shoppers don't even suspect that their precious digits may get into the hands of some smart guy who secretly left a keylogger on the computer.

So what is a keylogger? "A keylogger is a spyware that stealthily records all keystrokes you make, takes snapshots of your screen and emails a detailed report to its owner," explains Alexander Styopkin, CEO of Styopkin Software. "Such spyware may be installed by anyone who has an access to your computer or come as a component part of a virus or any other deceptively innocent application. Once installed, the keylogger is used to get hold of your credit card numbers, passwords, emails and other sensitive information. According to the latest surveys about 80% of home computers contain some type of spyware, including keyloggers."

Frightening figures. But is there a way to protect your computer from keyloggers? Mr. Styopkin continues "Unfortunately antivirus software and firewalls fail to detect them and they remain invisible in the Windows processes. What may help is a good anti-keylogger. Our company is currently offering Keylogger Hunter which can help you block the work of about 90% of keyloggers. Most of them are hook-based and they get the OS to inform them about pressed keys. With Keylogger Hunter, you can simply delete this information before it is captured by the spyware. As a result there is an empty file of a keylogger and nothing to email its owner."

Keylogger Hunter is a valuable addition to your security protection toolkit. It is small in size and takes minimum space on the hard drive.

Working transparently throughout the operating system, it consumes a few system resources and doesn't slow down the computer performance. By default it sits in the system tray and watches for suspicious activity in real time. Should there be a keylogger on your system, it simply paralyses the accumulation of information. And it does it without any interference from you and without the need to update the base of signatures. Another good thing about Keylogger Hunter is its price which is only \$19.95.

The program has already proved its workability and helped many home users and businesses prevent the theft of their credit card numbers and other confidential information. "I have had an incredible success with Keylogger Hunter," says Andrew Mokhov, co-founder of a legal advice office in Kiev, Ukraine. "After reading these nightmare articles about hackers and credit card theft, I decided to download the commercial version of your software and to my horror really, it found a keylogging program on my office computer. Fortunately it stopped it cold. Your program seemed to be just in time. Now I am recommending this anti-keylogger to my friends and hopefully they will get it too. A stitch in time saves nine, you know."

Pricing and Availability

Keylogger Hunter runs under Windows 2000/XP and costs \$19.95 (USD).

Registered customers are entitled to free upgrades and technical support. A 30-day evaluation version is available as a free download at <http://www.styopkin.com/KeyloggerHunterSetup.exe>.

An evaluation version can be obtained for review. If interested in reviewing this product, contact the Editor. (editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au)

- **Office Life**

Boston, MA -- June 3rd, 2005 --- Injoy Games (www.injoygames.com) is pleased to announce the release of their flagship title, *Office Life*!

Welcome to the wacky world of Corporate America. You are an intern entering the workforce at the bottom rung. Time to climb that ladder and achieve greatness, but first, you'll need to survive Mr. Bosstanova's grueling tasks. Do your job and you'll face riches – slack off and you'll end up scrubbing the floors forever.

Play an array of crazy office mini-games that will keep you on your toes all day long. Toss in a hand of blackjack, play with your virtual office 'pet' or climb the proverbial ladder through tasks. Office Life is the perfect coffee break diversion with mini-games that take only minutes to complete. Rest assured, you'll be replaying these addictive little office tasks again and again.

With online high score submittal, quick to pick up mouse driven gameplay and humor that's frighteningly easy to relate to, Office Life will keep you entertained throughout any tedious work week!

For more information on *Office Life* or to download a free demo, visit www.injoygames.com

Who knew work could be THIS much fun?

Screenshots:

<http://www.injoygames.com/officelife/fishtank.jpg>

<http://www.injoygames.com/officelife/blackjackscreen.jpg>

<http://www.injoygames.com/officelife/keyboardscreen.jpg>

<http://www.injoygames.com/officelife/golfscreen.jpg>

Demo Download link:

<http://www.injoygames.com/officelife/OfficeLifeInstall.exe>

Order Link (\$19.95):

<https://secure.bmtmicro.com/servlets/Orders.ShoppingCart?CLR=0&CID=1478&PRODUCTID=14780000>

This release was dated 3 June and offered a 15% discount from 1 June to 8 June, hence the need to post such releases directly to the mailing list.

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Amazing offer

Australian Personal Computer is Australia's oldest continually-published computer magazine and has gone through many changes during the years. In recent years it has move more into the mainstream with reviews, news and articles of interest to most computer users and it now carries a DVD of software on each issue. Those who don't have a DVD drive can either fit a DVD-ROM quite cheaply (about \$45), or can obtain selected programs from the DVD on CD. See <http://www.apcmag.com/cdmail>. Unfortunately, the magazine has also increased steadily in price over the years.

Now you can save:

Current or recent APC magazines (RRP \$9.80) are available at \$5 each (with unused software). \$4.00 of this price will be donated to HCUG funds.

Email patriciarogers@bigpond.com to order.

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