

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

Volume 4 – Issue 3 23 August 2005

In this issue

<u>StarOffice 8 in the Spring?</u>	
Release delayed	1
<u>OpenOffice 1.1.5</u>	
Read the new OpenDocument formats	1
<u>Firefox 1.0.6</u>	
Keep up with patches	1
<u>New virus wars</u>	
Your computer is at risk	2
<u>Keyboard & Mouse to return</u>	
As a series of computing guides	2
<u>Website</u>	
New links, more humour	3
<u>Linux pitfalls</u>	
Care when installing needed	3

StarOffice 8 in the Spring

A while back a July release was thought likely, but all software projects run late. It is even said that the more people you assign to a software project, the later it runs. With that thought in mind, it came as no surprise to find that the release date for StarOffice 8 is now predicted to be “in the fall” (our spring), while OpenOffice.org give a more pessimistic “later this year”.

While the StarOffice 8 public beta testing finished in April, you can still download the latest OpenOffice.org beta from <http://openoffice.org>. By trialling the suite and reporting any bugs that you find, you can help the open source programmers refine what I consider to be the best of the free office products.

[Index](#)

OpenOffice.org 1.1.5

Another OpenOffice.org release is imminent. OpenOffice.org 1.1.5 has reached Release Candidate 3. Release candidates are the final stages of testing prior to the official release. Having downloaded and installed the Linux version, I have to report that the only noticeable difference is that version 1.1.5 can *read*, but not *write*, documents in the new, widely-supported OpenDocument (OASIS) format. Having opened a StarOffice 8/OpenOffice 1.9 word processing document (.odt), say, with version 1.1.5, you can then save it in the older StarOffice format (.sxw) or in the current Microsoft Office format (.doc). OpenOffice.org 1.1.5 is also available from <http://openoffice.org>.

[Index](#)

Firefox 1.0.6

Internet Explorer users should, by now, be well aware of the need to keep up with the latest patches, made necessary by the

constant hacker attacks launched against this widely used browser. Firefox users should not think that they are immune and should also keep up with patches and new versions. The latest at the time of writing is 1.0.6. Watch for an upward pointing arrow near the top righthand corner of Firefox. When this arrow appears there are updates waiting, either for the browser or your add-on extensions. Just click on the arrow and the updates will be downloaded and installed. Doesn't get much easier than that.

[Index](#)

New virus wars

A new war between rival criminal gangs has seen virus releases intensifying. New worms are exploiting a flaw that Microsoft recently patched and it appears separate hacking groups are competing to infect unpatched machines. The first worm, Zobot C, is similar to other recent worms, but has been augmented so that it can spread via email by pretending to be a photographic attachment as well as by network sharing. It turns infected machines into part of a remote controlled network and is spreading slowly but steadily.

A second, Tilebot-F, is spreading much more quickly and downloads spyware as well as a Trojan allowing remote control of the PC. Antivirus company, Sophos, suspects that Tilebot has been written by a different group and that separate gangs of virus writers are involved.

As Vnu.net reported it on 18 August 2005:

The worm attacks on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday appear to come from three distinct hacking groups according to Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at F-Secure. "We seem to have a botwar on our hands," he said. "There appear to be three different virus writing gangs turning out new worms at an alarming rate – it's as if they are competing to see who will build the biggest network of infected machines. The latest variants of Bozori even remove competing viruses like Zotob from the machines!"

What has made these worms different is the speed with which they were created. Microsoft released its patches on August 9 and the patches had been reverse engineered and exploit code was released by August 12. Since then three distinct worm types have exploited the vulnerability.

"Organised criminal gangs are behind attacks like these and their motive is to make money," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for Sophos. "Owning a large network of compromised computers is a valuable asset to these criminals and every business needs to take steps to ensure they are not the next victim on their list."

Experts are expecting a busy week ahead as the pool of unpatched PCs still remains a tempting target for hackers as many individuals and organisations have yet to finish the testing and installation of the new code.

Once hackers gain remote control of your computer, they can use it as a zombie machine pumping out spam to other Internet users. This can significantly slow your computer down. Worse yet, if your Internet Service Provider meters and charges for upload traffic (e.g Bigpond's broadband starter pack), becoming infected with one of these worms could therefore cost you a lot of money.

Among the techniques being used to get email users to open infected attachments is one involving a graphic of an albino gorilla. You could save they are using "gorilla tactics" and Vnu.net did:

<http://www.vnUNET.com/vnUNET/news/2127318/virus-writers-resort-gorilla-tactics>

Major antivirus vendors have identified signature files and updates to their antivirus software have been made available for download. Microsoft is urging all users to patch systems immediately.

[Index](#)

Keyboard & Mouse to return

At the suggestion of some members who found the name “*Thuggery*” (derived from the name of the original group – “*Tandy Hobart Users Group*”) a little offensive, we changed the name of our printed newsletter to the more innocuous “*Keyboard & Mouse*”, named after the most common input devices. Unfortunately, rising printing costs meant we had to discontinue *K & M* and “*Bytes & Pieces*”, which had begun as an ad-hoc updating of the printed newsletter took over. Now I propose to revive the *K & M* title and use it on a series of guides to computing.

Two possible formats are being considered. The first is the traditional A4 PDF one that can easily be printed and filed. The second is an on-screen format. This would be either PDF or Flash and would be designed to be easily read on screen. If the latter were to be PDF, it should be possible to produce a printable version as well. Your suggestions on which format you prefer would be most welcome, but email them to me as soon as possible, because I will need to decide the format in the next week or so, if the publication deadline is to be met.

The first, with a planned publication date of 13 September 2005, will deal with the defensive measures every computer user needs to take. It will look at antivirus software, the use of firewalls and spyware removing programs. And it will also look at backup and disk-imaging software. In the second issue I hope to cover email clients, preventing and dealing with spam, email techniques and email etiquette.

If you have any hints, techniques, or favourite programs to do with defending your computer from the many types of malware and attacks that are so common these days, or with emailing and spam, email the Editor with details so that your contribution can be included.

[Index](#)

Website

As mentioned at the AGM, the website is currently undergoing some overdue updating. The Navigation links at the top and left of the page have been amended. New links to other useful websites have been added. The Daily Cartoon button has been replaced with a Humour button which leads to our new Humour pages. These include links to Dilbert, Garfield, Peanuts, the Daily Cartoon (courtesy of Bravenet) and our own collection of computer jokes. Work on the Hints section is continuing.

At the supermarket the other night I ran into one of our (unfinancial?) members who didn't know where we are now meeting. I felt like pointing out to him that the information, including a map of how to get there, is on the website. So spread the word: If you want to know when the next meeting is on, where it will be held, who the Office Bearers are, how to contact the Group, etc. ... It's all on the website: <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>.

[Index](#)

Linux pitfalls

Another potential reviewer has offered his service, so we may yet see reviews of software in the newsletter. On the other hand, Bob Curran upset his computer by trying to install Fedora 3 Linux and so the HTML version of the newsletter has been put on the back burner until he gets everything back up and running.

Some distributions of Linux do require knowledgeable and careful installation on machines that already have an operating system, as Bob discovered. That's one reason that Linux isn't as popular as it, perhaps, deserves to be. For easy installation, I recommend Xandros OCE. If installing onto a computer without an operating system, most, but not all, Linux distributions will do the job without too many difficulties.

[Index](#)

©Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. (except where stated otherwise) Last changed: 23 August 2005
Editor: Peter Campbell, C/-Hobart Computer Users Group Inc., PO Box 563, Rosny Park Tas 7018, Australia.
Phone: (03) 6234 4691 Email: editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au.

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed herein are those of the Editor or the author of the item concerned and are not necessarily endorsed by the Management Committee of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. While care is taken in compiling the information in this newsletter, the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. and its officers and members cannot take responsibility for any problems arising from the use of the information.

Website: Back issues are available from our website <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>.

Subscriptions: To subscribe to this newsletter, please visit our website. It is available in PDF format.

Reprinting: While permission will be given to other non-profit organisations to reprint items from this newsletter, (where the Group holds the copyright to the material in question), please contact the Editor for verification before reprinting.