



SPAMMERS STILL WINNING THE WAR

According to Webroot's "State of Internet Security: Protecting Business Email" report, in 2008, there will be over 42,000 spam e-mails for every single business e-mail account, or about 116 per day, and these threats are severely impacting businesses around the world.

"We don't expect to contain [spam] as long as people can make money off it," said Peter Watkins, CEO of Webroot. "[Security] tools have not kept up with the nature of [these] attacks."

Webroot found that more than half of the 1500 people surveyed experienced spyware and virus attacks via e-mail and over 40 per cent experienced a phishing attack. Additionally, about one out of five organizations reported that sensitive online transactions were threatened and confidential information was compromised as a result of spam and over 60 per cent of respondents had at least one e-mail outage in 2007. One out of three survey respondents said that the hourly cost of an e-mail outage was over \$1,000.

One of the findings of the report noted that individual e-mail users opened messages before realizing they were spam, opened messages in junk folders and even made purchases from e-mails marked as spam.

Even though people have been told not to click on any e-mails messages from senders they do not know, Watkins said that sometimes those e-mails are too irresistible not to.

"We can control a lot of spam if people didn't open them but there [will always be] something that happens to intrigue them and they take a chance on it. It is human behavior and also social engineering."

He added that all the education in the world won't stem the tide of spam and a number of upcoming events like the U.S. presidential election and the Beijing Olympic Games will only make it harder for people not to click on those spam messages.

Another finding was that one out of three organizations reported employee misuse of e-mail resources.

Webroot also discovered that less than a third of organizations surveyed had key employee e-mail security policies in place and that less than half of companies with more than 100 computers had policies in place to restrict employees personal e-mail use.

"It is not something they spend tremendous amount of time on and people tend to wait until something becomes a problem before they react. The smaller companies are overwhelmed by those kinds of attacks and they just don't have the time or resources to present that enterprise-class defense against these attacks," explained Watkins.

He added that because smaller organizations can't spend the time and the resources to defend themselves that they will be compromised in such a way that they will not be aware of it and end up putting themselves in dire risk for both customer data and financial loss.

Watkins advised that small- and medium-sized businesses look for outside help by finding the right channel partners who can help them put in good basic policies.

"That is absolutely essential first and foremost," he added. "Second of all is to look for a set of tools that would provide enterprise-class capability without the enterprise-class manageability headaches and doing at the budget small businesses can afford. We believe that Symantec Mail Security is the right approach that accomplishes those latter goals."



TO UPGRADE TO WINDOWS VISTA OR NOT?

That is the question. The debate pitting Windows Vista against its predecessor Windows XP continues to rage, from consumer desktops to corporate decision-makers – to upgrade, or not to upgrade?

Everyone's going to experience some pain in order to get to the nirvana of a Vista deployment. Here some of my favorite things about Vista, and some of the negatives too.

PRO – IMPROVED FUNCTIONALITY

Vista's Aero graphical interface isn't just all about looks. The biggest noticeable difference from looking at a Vista desktop compared to XP is the higher fidelity graphics. The translucent borders on the window make it easier to not get lost in a series of overlapping windows. It makes it easier to concentrate on what you're looking at. Added perks are small previews of the windows stowed away on your taskbar when you hover over them.

Multimedia also gets richer icons that better represent the content of the file. Those accustomed to Google-searching every Web page they access on the Internet will appreciate the built-in file system indexing and search ability in Vista.

A Search bar directly off the Start menu instantly brings up an application or file based on key word. Search folders can be saved to be re-run at any time, and bring up new files that fit the criteria.

CON – IT'S EXPENSIVE

Resistance to adopting Vista has been particularly harsh. A lot of people have been avoiding Vista like the plague. You've got to get the opinion that there's some sort of compelling reasons not to use it. One of those reasons might be the cost involved. Some of your older hardware might need an upgrade – an additional cost to the licenses you purchase. To support Vista, you should have at least one gigabyte of RAM. And depending on how high resolution you want to run your desktop, a high-end graphics card is a good idea.

PRO – PERFORMANCE BOOST

If you do have the hardware to run Vista, you'll benefit from some performance boosting features of the OS. Vista uses the graphical processor to render the extra fidelity offered by the Aero display. That leaves your core CPU free to run your applications.

ReadyBoost is a little-known feature that helps machines low on RAM. The tool allows a flash drive to be inserted and act as cache memory. The speed at which you can find small files is much faster on that thumb drive.

The OS also engages in some psychic-like attempts at guessing what applications you will run and when you'll use them. Super-fetch pre-caches the applications you like to use often, so they'll load faster when you launch them.

CON – INCOMPATIBLE HARDWARE/SOFTWARE

While you're able to boost the performance of some of your applications, others may not work at all. You'll have the most trouble if it's a more obscure piece of software, or an application developed in-house. But 98 out of the top 100 applications are now compatible with the newer OS, and it's added to its supported list since

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launch. Likewise, some hardware will run into compatibility barriers with Vista. Support for hardware has increased since shipping, with 54,000 drivers available on Windows Update today improving upon the original 13,000 available.

PRO – BETTER SECURITY

The Apple commercial depicting a secret service agent pestering a Windows user over every single action they're taking is an effective one, but not necessarily accurate. If we look at it from an administrator's perspective, then we've known for years that we should have different user accounts for admin and standard users. Vista puts every user in standard mode and then asks for approval when administrative tasks are performed. User Account Control is designed to stop malicious programs from opening your computer up to attack. It can be programmed to go away, but it's one of the best new security features and it would be crazy to do so.

Users with sensitive data can use BitLocker to encrypt entire drives to protect them from prying eyes. Users of XP had to choose files and folders to encrypt separately.

On the Internet security front, a new phishing filter in Internet Explorer 7 and Windows Mail flags potentially unsafe Web pages. Vista also runs the browser at the lowest privilege level, so any changes it tries to make to your system will be blocked and prompt for permission.

Vista also allows firewalls to restrict what traffic is outbound for the first time. If you have applications you want to restrict your users from using on the Web, you can now lock that down.

CON – UNNECESSARY BURDEN

When it comes right down to it, a business should just ask if migrating to Vista is worth all the trouble. Deployment is especially complicated in larger organizations and can cause disruption during the transition time. There's also productivity loss on the side of the employee. Any big change in any organization is going to cause some discomfort for people using the technology. There's going to be some calls to the help desk for awhile, and there will be some user angst the whole process.

Also, if you're using Windows XP and it supports all of your hardware, and works the way you need it to, there may be no major reason to upgrade. Much of the gained functionality in Vista has been added to XP through Windows Update.

Granted Vista is prettier, but does that really contribute to my bottom line? Each business must weigh the pros and cons for their specific situation and make a decision, he concludes.

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