

Dead Trees

A PUBLICATION OF
QUESTIONABLE VALUE FROM
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COMMUNICATIONS

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Be careful out there!

Remember *Hill Street Blues?* Most episodes included roll call, which always ended with the crusty old sergeant reminding the officers to “be careful out there.” These days, it’s not always easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys. Recently I received what, at casual glance, appeared to be a warning from an antivirus company. It claimed to include an attachment that would protect me from the “Klez” virus.

It was, in fact, **infected** with the Klez virus. Even if Norton Antivirus hadn’t caught it, I wouldn’t have been naive enough to have run the attachment because no software company routinely sends out anything like this. If they send anything, it will be a message with a link to the **company’s** website where you can download the file described.

But even then you have to be cautious. A link that claims to take you to “Microsoft.com” might actually take you to “KillThisComputer.com”.

Because I’m an outspoken spam opponent, I’ve attracted a few enemies and because I have a couple of high-profile e-mail addresses related to *Technology Corner* on WTVN, sometimes it seems like everybody’s out to kill my computer.

I receive several infected files every week – most from people who have simply allowed their computers to become infected, but some are clearly attempts to plant a program that will turn my computer into a “zombie” that can be taken over by the person who sent the attachment.

Besides the Klez virus masquerading as a Klez cure, I received at least 10 other Klez-infected files that week. Klez is a worm-virus combination that will send itself to all e-mail addresses in the Microsoft Outlook address book. The subject and attachment name are randomly chosen, but the attachment will always have one of these extensions: bat, exe, pif, or scr.

Klez will contain 1 of 3 virus attachments. Two of these are relatively benign, but 1 has a payload that **destroys files on the 13th of March and September.**

An ongoing problem

In the first 4 months of 2002, I’ve received around 75 infected files. Most wouldn’t have done any serious damage, except to my ego. The majority simply start sending e-mail messages to others in an attempt to spread themselves. A few would have randomly deleted, damaged, or changed files.

A small change to a randomly selected file could go unnoticed. Assuming the file to be all right, you would copy it to your backup tape. If you’re an accountant, a random change to a tax file could be embarrassing. If you’re a doctor, a random change to a patient’s file could be fatal.

Viruses and worms are serious business. Protecting against them is a multi-step process.

- First, you need to install a good antivirus program. There are several, but I’ve used Norton Antivirus for close to a decade. I know how it works. I understand it. So I continue to use it.
- Second, make sure that your antivirus program automatically scans all incoming e-mail messages. E-mail is the single most serious security threat because it’s not perceived as being a threat.
- Next, you need to make sure that the virus definitions are updated regularly. It used to be that Norton issued monthly updates. Then the updates came twice a month. Then weekly. Now an update can happen at any time and the latest version of Norton Antivirus checks for updates every time I start the computer.
- Fourth, your computer should have a software firewall even if you connect to the Internet via a dial-up connection or you’re connected to the Internet via a router/switch.

The critical 5th step

One additional step is more important than the other four combined: use your wetware when opening e-mail. “Wetware” is the logic device situated midway between your ears and behind your eyes. Before you open any **attachment**, even if it has been approved by your antivirus software, take a look at the **message**. If it’s from somebody you don’t know, treat it with extreme caution. If it’s from somebody you know, but the message doesn’t sound like something the person would say, check to make sure that person really sent you a message. If you work in the mailroom and the company president (who has never before sent you a message) is now asking for your opinion tin futures in Paraguay, be suspicious.

If users would exercise the wetware before opening attachments, the previous 4 steps would be unnecessary.


What the heck is this?

Dead Trees is the William Blinn Communications newsletter. It’s published whenever I feel like it, although I generally feel like it when I’m preparing the month’s invoices. If you didn’t receive an invoice with this newsletter, kindly contact me and we’ll rectify that situation. Please note that despite the name, of the publication, I bear no particular animosity toward trees. The name is simply an acknowledgment that paper is made from, well, dead trees.

Going beyond virus protection

Norton Internet Security is Symantec's easy answer to the Internet's most serious threats: viruses, programs that can take over your computer, crackers, information leaks, and threats to children. You may prefer to use just the Norton Antivirus program and choose a firewall program from a company such as Zone Labs. Or you may prefer a security product from another publisher. **Which** you choose is unimportant. **That** you choose is critical. Trite, but true:

- The only good virus is a dead virus.
- It's much easier to keep a virus off your computer than it is to remove one from your computer.
- Better safe than sorry.

For more information about various Symantec products, see www.Symantec.com and to learn more about Zone Alarm, see www.ZoneLabs.com. 

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My friend, the cell phone


Everybody may not have a cell phone yet, but it certainly seems like they do. If you travel, owning a cell phone really beings to make a lot of sense.

Make a phone call from a hotel, and you'll experience *hotel long-distance rates*. "Highway robbery" would not be an unfair description in most cases. A call that might cost 5 cents a minute if made from your home can cost 2 dollars a minute from a hotel. I have occasionally been surprised by charges of \$50 or more for a week's worth of local calls to check e-mail.

No more. I now can connect to my ISP by attaching my Sprint PCS phone to a Windows CE device, a PC running Windows, a Mac, or any one of several other devices. Since I have nationwide long distance included in my "local" minutes, I can call the ISP in the city where I am or the number I use at home.

Sprint PCS is one of Blue Kite's service partners. Blue Kite is the service that improves connection speeds from the pitiful 14.4Kbps that the US cellular system is currently capable of providing to the equivalent of about 56Kbps. You can use Blue Kite with Windows, but not if you're using a CE device. It also doesn't work with Mac systems or Palm OS devices.

No surprise to frequent travelers: There is a strong case for using your cell phone for all calls. In March I was in New York with my wife and younger daughter and we called my older daughter to tell her what we'd been doing. I also called some friends in the city to arrange meetings. In all, I used 244 minutes of airtime in New York. Making those calls on a hotel phone could have cost \$200 to \$400. If I'd used a calling card, it would still have added perhaps \$30 to my hotel bill. As it was, the minutes were included in my monthly cellular service fee.

Go ahead, ET (economical traveler) – phone home. 

On the road again


From the looks of things, this year's PC Expo (June 25-27) will be the smallest in a decade. "Small" doesn't mean insignificant, though. Gone are the pre-dot-bomb days of nearly 1000 exhibitors. The show will feature no more than 300 companies this year.



The trade show (the PC Expo part) is important, but by no means the entire event. The overall event was renamed TechX NY last year and it includes conferences on new technology, mobile communications, small-business technology, Web development, and digital video.

See www.TechxNY.com for more information on the show. And keep in mind that my reports from the show are once again available at a price that's little more than what you'd pay for air fare to get to New York. After paying the airline, you would have to deal with the hotel (*Know any good ones in NYC under \$200 a night?*) and with show registration (\$500 to \$2000 unless you want to see just the trade show for about \$50).

Because this year's trade show will be so much smaller than it's been since about 1990, the additional activities (some of which are by invitation only) are even more important. Needless to say, I'll be on the trade show floor, but I'll also be at the invitation-only events.

If you'd like more information about how to get my heads-up report on technology that will be on your desktop within the next 12 to 36 months, send a note to grok@blinn.com. "Grok" is "understand" in Unix/Linux. 

Publish or perish?

Despite the "conventional wisdom" that *Quark XPress* is the publishing program of the future, every issue of *Dead Trees* has included a small promotional message for *Ventura Publisher*.

Quark has released XPress version 5, but it appears to have few new features, except for the ability to create tables without a plug-in. Adobe recently began shipping *InDesign* version 2.0, the self-proclaimed "Quark killer".

Adobe also continues to sell *PageMaker* (repositioned as the *Microsoft Publisher* killer) and *FrameMaker*, the applications without a clear market (but it runs on Windows, Mac, and Unix).

Corel will be releasing a new version of *Ventura Publisher* by mid year. I'll be attending the Ventura Summit in July to learn more about it.

I'll have a report for you later this year on where desktop publishing is going. No matter what program you're using today or what Adobe or Quark promise, this would be a very good time to wait. Let's see what Corel puts on the table before placing a bet! 