

Virus warning: Beware the Lovgate worm

Anti-virus vendors are warning Internet users to look out for yet another worm. Called Lovgate, the worm has three variants (A,B and C), and is slightly more difficult to spot than the earlier 'Catherine Zeta Jones' malware, as emails carrying it come with random subject lines and contain attachments with a range of file names.

From the copies so far intercepted, the email body text may contain the words, "I'll try to reply as soon as possible. Take a look to the attachment and send me your opinion!"

The file attachment is written in Microsoft Visual C/C++ and is compressed using ASPack and is 78,848 bytes in size, according to anti-virus specialists. Attachment file names may include: BILLGT.EXE, CARD.EXE, DOCS.EXE, FUN.EXE, HAMSTER.EXE, HUMOR.EXE, IMAGES.EXE, JOKE.EXE, MIDSONG.EXE, NEWS_DOC.EXE, PICS.EXE, PSPGAME.EXE, S3MSONG.EXE, SEARCHURL.EXE, SETUPEXE, TAMAGOTXI.EXE.

According to initial analysis, Lovgate is a mass-mailing worm that incorporates an SMTP engine and a backdoor component. In a statement an antivirus company said that although the virus contains an SMTP engine, it attempts to connect to a host on the Internet to deliver its email. When activated, the virus may try to reply to any emails it finds in the recipient's in-box, attaching itself to the email.

Government surveillance centre goes live

The UK government's new GBP25m Internet surveillance centre has become fully operational. The National Technical Assistance Centre (NTAC) acts as an intermediary between Internet service providers (ISP) and law enforcement agencies for intercepting and reading emails and web traffic. NTAC will act as a clearing house, taking requests for law enforcement agencies for interception of communications and liaising with the ISPs. It is likely to deal with several thousand requests a year, and is based at MI5 headquarters.

The centre has been decrypting seized computer data since summer 2001, but has now added the capability to intercept Internet traffic and emails. It was due to become operational last summer, but was delayed. A Home Office spokesman confirmed the centre had gained 'operational capacity' in April, but refused to give further details.

But in a statement on its website, the Home Office notes: 'Use of encryption to protect stored computer files is increasing and threatens the prosecution of those with the greatest motivation to conceal the content of those files, such as pornographers and paedophiles. 'NTAC will undertake any processing necessary to make lawfully intercepted material intelligible. NTAC will not analyse the intelligible content of any intercepted material. That will remain a function for the agency which applied for the interception warrant.'

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