

Don't Push That Button

By William Powell

In an episode of the 1990s MTV cartoon series *Ren and Stimpy*, titled "Space Madness," Stimpy is told to guard the History Eraser Button because pushing it will erase the duo's existence. Yet, the button is so shiny, so red, so tempting.

Every time I receive an email with a strange attachment, I think of poor Stimpy fighting the urge to push that button. I also think of the millions of workers who are just as tempted to open a possibly infected attachment that

could cause hours of downtime, lost productivity, and revenue.

One change that has made us increasingly vulnerable is the prevalence of worms, or viral variants, that spread over internal and external network connections, gobble up computer resources, and often leave behind Trojan horse programs, many of which seek out our passwords.

So, why does that make us more vulnerable? Worms thrive in Microsoft Outlook's automation interface. Once a

computer on the network has been infected, the virus enters its Outlook address book and promptly sends an email to your friends, family, and associates, which increases the likelihood of it slipping by your first line of defense: fear of the unknown.

Whereas earlier viruses contained subject lines or messages that tickled prurient fancies, such as photos of tennis player Anna Kournikova (VBS.VBSWG. Generic for the geeks), more recent messages have appealed to our humanity and sense of professionalism. Subject lines such as I LOVE YOU (VBS/Loveletter) or HI, HOW ARE YOU (Goner), or I HOPE YOU CAN HELP ME WITH THIS FILE (variations of Sircam), weaken the defenses of all but the most jaded employee. Add that the message is from Bob in accounting, and it's doubly hard to resist pushing that button.

You have to harden yourself. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that globally viruses and security breaches cost corporations more than US\$1.39 trillion in lost revenue last year. According to *Computer Week*, the Loveletter worm alone infected 90 percent of all companies in Europe and North America, with a worldwide cost of repair coming in at US\$1 billion. As viruses become more complex, more insidious, that number is likely to increase. "One thing is certain," says Ian Hameroff, director of anti-virus solutions at Computer Associates, "Either people's habits and practices are going to change, or we're going to see more devastation."

So, what can you do to prevent viruses? Lists of 10 tips abound, but they all can be narrowed down to one rule: Don't open an email attachment if it in any way looks suspicious. In other words, don't push that button.

For more information on protecting your company from viruses, try these sites.

McAfee www.mcafee.com

Computer Associates www3.ca.com/virus

Trend Micro www.antivirus.com

Viral Countdown

Here they are:

Goner, Sircam, Kournikova—
the most prevalent viruses
of 2001, Letterman style.

10 Win32.Goner.A
(Pentagone)

9 VBS.VBSWG.Generic
(Kournikova)

8 Win32.Nimda.A

7 Win95.MTX

6 Win32.Hybris.B
(Snowwhite)

5 Win32.Magistr.B

4 Win32.Badtrans.13312

3 Win32.Magistr

2 Win32.Sircam.137216

And number one
Win32.Badtrans.B

[Source/Computer Associates](#)

The year is 1996. The Web is a strange and wonderful place, full of promise and potential. The buzzword of the day is *dot.com*. Most of us have never even heard of a *dot.bomb*. Oh, those were the days. A new tool from the Internet Archive www.archive.org and Alexa.com can transport you back to those early days of the Internet. It's called the Wayback Machine. Think of it as a vast store of Internet history, a free library with archived versions of 10 billion Webpages, which now has scholars, journalists, designers—and lots of

TimeMachine

Webloafers—clambering to get another look at the garbage and gold from just five short years ago. Created by Brewster Kahle, a wealthy computer scientist, the archive has captured nearly 150 terabytes of information (the entire content of the Library of Congress is a mere 20 terabytes) and has quickly become the world's largest database. Some thoughts on the Internet, circa 1996: Few, if any, Websites established a memorable look. Does anyone even remember the early Amazon.com logo? It's also surprising how much more polished current Websites have become. A quick visit to favorites, such as the *New York Times* online www.nytimes.com and the Internet Movie Database (IMDB for those in the know) www.imdb.com turns up sites that were quaint and refreshingly simple. Of course, you'll have your favorites you'll want to look up. But I warn you, it's addictive. If there's one thing the Web reminds me of on a daily basis, it's that information is fleeting: The average lifespan of a Webpage is 100 days. When you consider all of the information, the first steps and the missteps, and that history is being made and lost on the Internet, you begin to see the importance of a project like this one. Thankfully, someone is keeping track.

William Powell is an associate editor of T+D; wpowell@astd.com.

@Work covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to atwork@astd.org.



pera,
you
either
love it
or hate it.

But have you tried the Opera browser? Yes, there's an alternative to Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape's Navigator. And, no, you don't have to know a thing about Verdi www.guiseppeverdi.it or have been to the Met www.metopera.org to use it or feel slightly superior to your office mates.

Developed by the Oslo, Norway-based Opera Software ASA www.opera.com Opera 6.0 is more than the "other" browser; it's a new approach. Opera browsers work off of what its developers call a "multiple document interface." MDI enables users to surf with several pages open at once and then toggle back and forth between them. Opera also lets you save a window before closing so that you can pick up where you left off. For anyone who spends research time on the Web, those two features alone can make this browser indispensable.

Billed as the "fastest browser on Earth," it's still unlikely you'll notice much difference in the rate at which Opera loads pages. You will gain time, however, with the extensive shortcuts. Of course, if you feel more comfort-



able using your mouse, Opera lets you navigate and open new windows with just a gesture.

Additional timesavers and nifty conveniences abound. The Hotclick feature allows users to access an encyclopedia, dictionary, or search engine just by double-clicking on a word within a Webpage. Say for instance that you want to know a little more about the British city of Leicester www.leicester.gov.uk. You'd double-click *Leicester*, select *encyclopedia*, and you'd be taken to a set of listings in which you'd learn that Leicester has been an important industrial center since the 14th century, and it's noted for the manufacture of hosiery, knitwear, and shoes.

Drawbacks? Opera doesn't integrate into Windows as well or as simply as Internet Explorer. To the uninitiated, the MDI can be a little off-putting. As this user sums it up, Opera is an acquired taste. Hey, just like opera.

Unlike opera, cost of admission is free. Downloads of a shareware version, with unobtrusive banner ad, can be had at the Opera Website.