

Scam Is the New Spam

By William Powell

I appreciate a good email hoax. Some people detest them and their creators, but for me the best hoaxes are like good fiction: They have a compelling story; they're sensitive to the human condition; and when all is said and done, they're somewhat entertaining—as long as *you* don't get scammed.

One hoax making the rounds again is Jdbgmgr.exe, or the Teddy Bear hoax. It's harmless to computers, but I'm not so sure about computer users.

Like viral worms, this hoax exists simply to spread to as many computers as possible. But Jdbgmgr.exe just masquerades as a worm, using psychology instead of computer code to spread. The hoax presents an email warning stating that the sender's computer has been infected by a virus and that it's likely, since the recipient is in the sender's email address book, that the recipient could have been infected, too. The message then asks you to seek out the malicious program on your



computer and delete it within 14 days before it “destroys the whole system.” You’ll know you have the virus when you locate the file: Its icon is a teddy bear.

The file in question isn’t a virus; it’s Microsoft’s Debugger Registrar for Java script. Deleting it is harmless, though Java programmers might miss it. It’s used to debug Java code.

What I find fascinating about this hoax is that instead of using an actual embedded virus, it just exploits our sense of decency in order to spread. Call it a psychological virus—one that is an interesting reflection of the way we perceive the Internet.

The hoax asks us to delete a file with an icon of a teddy bear, a symbol of innocence. Of course, we’ve been burned before by seemingly innocent messages and games. Remember the bowling elves? If the icon were a little computer, or something more important or official looking, we’d think twice. But we see that bear and it seems perfectly reasonable for us to delete the file, because that’s what hackers do: They hide malicious code behind endearing images and sentiments such as I love you.

To date, a healthy dose of cynicism

has been one of our best defenses against scams and spam. But it makes me wonder at what price the Internet is changing our lives for the better. For instance, in using this work tool we confront deceit on a regular basis. Somehow that doesn’t seem healthy. So, instead of distrust and cynicism, I prescribe good sense, better understanding of related technologies, and a sense of humor. I still get a chuckle thinking about the Internet cleaning hoax from the early days of the Web—the one that had us logging off for 24 hours while powerful Japanese-made, meta-crawler robots scoured the Web for old email and dead FTPs. Boy, were we suckers.

For more information on Internet scams and online fraud, visit Scambusters.org <|> www.scambusters.org. The site provides details on hundreds of Internet viruses, scams, and fraud-busting tips. The free monthly email newsletter is also a good way to keep from getting taken.

Also check out Snopes.com <|> www.snopes.com. It’s the place to go for debunking urban legends.

It’s the other bookstore from the other Pacific Northwest state. But for many readers, Powells.com

<|> www.powells.com is *the* place to shop online for new and used books.

Powells got its start in 1971 as a humble reseller of used books in Portland, Oregon, and has been online since 1994. Though Seattle’s Amazon.com gets most of the attention, Powells is quickly becoming the choice for discriminating readers. I like the company’s unique approach to selling used books alongside new ones. That’s useful when you’re looking for a specific edition or format. Powells also stocks a large selection of text books and technical books, as well as HR and learning titles. If you’re just looking for something to read at the beach, there’s plenty of that, too.

One of my favorite features of the site is the email lists. A monthly newsletter includes reviews, an interview of a featured author, and a list of sales and recommended selections. If you find it hard to stay on top of new releases, a weekly e-newsletter provides reviews from such major publications as *Harpers*, *Esquire*, and the *New Republic*.

Unwired? Unwind

You’re tired and sunburned, and you’ve finally found a few minutes to take a break from your vacation and check your email. But there’s just one catch: Your cozy beach bungalow doesn’t have an Internet connection. Not to worry, the folks at Netcafe.com <|> www.netcafe.com now offer a cyber



cafe locating service in the one form that’s always accessible—a paperback.

Don’t Panic! lists locations for more than 3000 cyber cafes in 143 countries. Though a reliable Internet connection is assured, the book’s editors aren’t making any guarantees about the coffee.

A Burger and Wi-Fi

If you can't find a place in your travels that offers Wi-Fi and a good cup of coffee, I just got word of a little place that offers Wi-Fi and hamburgers. The Golden Arches, yes McDonald's, is now wired for wireless. In one of the more unusual efforts to bring wireless Internet to mainstream America, McDonald's has begun a pilot program in

Manhattan that offers patrons one free hour of Wi-Fi access with the purchase of any Extra Value Meal. The fast-food giant has suffered lately, with slumping sales and disgruntled franchisees. Could Wi-Fi put the gilt back on the golden arches?

The initiative is taking a bit of ribbing (mmmm, McRibb) from analysts. Though metropolitan areas have the

highest concentration of Wi-Fi users, some of those McDonald's locations can be the least inviting, and I know I've never seen someone enjoying a Big Mac in front of an open laptop. Even at the price, it's going to be a tough sell for McDonald's to get customers to hang around and use the service, especially when urban locations often enforce 30-minute dining limits and customers have to pay a quarter to use the restroom.

The real potential for the pairing may be in the suburbs and small towns. Providing reliable, convenient access for users, where hotspots are few and far between, could be a big boost for the technology and for manufacturers such as program partner Intel, which has a lot riding on its new Wi-Fi-equipped Centrino chipset.

Though it's easy to poke fun at McDonald's adoption of Wi-Fi, I think that anytime a company with the chain's presence (more than 30,000 franchises worldwide) adopts a new technology, you have to take notice. And McDonald's has a successful track record for establishing systems that make things easy, affordable, and consistent. The wireless network will be accessible by employees as well.

If it helps me get my order faster, I'm all for it.

William Powell is learning technologies editor of T+D; wpowell@astd.com.

The Web covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to theweb@astd.org.

Quick Clicks

Most people are content to let search engines work their magic; they have no interest in what makes them tick. The spidering, algorithm crunching, and headline grabbing that go into generating results is akin to watching sausage being made. Nevertheless, knowing how they work not only makes your searches more powerful, but it can also direct traffic to the one page that really counts—yours.

Search Engine Watch 

<http://searchenginewatch.com> provides the latest news, reviews, and tips regarding search engines. Visitors can brush up on tips for power searching. Webmasters and Website owners can learn how to improve their listings or access detailed information on listing issues. There's even an excellent intro to the technology that goes on behind the screens.

Quick Tips

In the rush to delete spam from your in-box, it's easy to throw out the keepers tucked in-between. One trick for sorting out legitimate email is by assigning messages from co-workers a specific color, such as red for managers and blue for colleagues. To do so in Microsoft Outlook, it only takes a few steps.

With Outlook open, go to Tools, then Organize, and in the Organize dialogue box, click on Using Colors. The button is to the left.

Now highlight a message in your in-box from a sender who you'd like to assign a color. Notice that his or her name or email address appears in the text box on the Ways to Organize Inbox pane. All that's left to do is to choose a color from the drop-down menu and click Apply. Current and future emails from that sender will now appear in your chosen color.