

DIGITAL BEAT

The Wild Wild Web

By William Powell

The fight for Internet security has often been referred to as a duel between the white hats and the black hats. But I doubt anyone was prepared for Microsoft's frontier-style form of justice when the company recently issued a US\$5 million reward fund for people who turn in virus developers.

Like a marshal nailing a "Most Wanted" sign to a post, Microsoft, in a joint press conference with the FBI, Secret Service, and Interpol, pledged re-

wards of \$250,000 each for information leading to the capture of the Blaster and SoBig.F creators. Both viruses have targeted vulnerabilities in Microsoft products, such as Outlook, and wreaked their fair share of havoc with enterprise users.

The question is, Will it work?

Though hacking is a solitary pursuit with strong rivalries, it's also an activity of a tight-knit group in which there's little honor in ratting someone out. Never-

theless, Microsoft has sent a message that it is serious about security. There might not be a new sheriff in town, but there is a more determined one.

Hey! I've Been Bluejacked!

You've suffered through watching others get "X'd" by Jamie Kennedy and "punked" by those punks at MTV. Now, prepare to be Bluejacked.

With more than 1 million Bluetooth-enabled devices shipping weekly worldwide (so says Bluetooth SIG, the technology's official trade organization), it was only a matter of time before someone figured out that hijacking open Bluetooth connections could result in a bit of devilish fun.

Bluetooth is a short-range wireless technology that relies on radio waves to transmit data between devices. One of the more popular applications is in wireless headsets for cell phones, such as Jabra's Freespeak. Peripheral manufacturers are also using it to cut the cord on keyboards and mice. Microsoft's optical desktop for Bluetooth is a fine example of the technology. But Bluetooth-enabled cell phones or PDAs allow for more advanced functionality, such as the transfer of contact information, task lists, and image files between devices. These cell phones and PDAs also let users seek out other Bluetooth-enabled devices nearby (within about 30 feet), and that's where Bluejacking comes into play.

Bluejackers seek out other users within a crowd, often using Bluetooth-enabled cell phones. Although not designed with text messaging in mind, Bluetooth does allow for short messages to be sent between devices. Users can refuse any incoming message or data, so Bluejackers change their username to a short barb or compliment to beat you to the punch. For example, you might receive something along the lines of "Incoming message from: Dude, you've

been Bluejacked." Or, "Incoming message from: ROI is overrated."

Thankfully, it's easy to play the spoiler in such high jinks. Just be sure to keep your Bluetooth capability turned off when not in use, or create an "invisible" device when setting it up. Your owner's manual can walk you through the steps.

As you might expect, Bluejacking has its own official Website. For more information, visit Bluejackq.com.

Pile On

After using Google for the past five years as my primary means of searching the Web, I can find little in its design or performance to fault. But its straightforward minimalism, which was once so charming, is starting to get on my nerves. Those six letters adorned in primary colors have actually started to look smug.

So, last week I decided to join the increasing number of Web users who are piling onto Dogpile.com, a Website best described as a metasearch engine with a sense of humor. And, for the time being, searching the Web with Dogpile *is* more fun.

Two things to consider when using Dogpile: One, you're not really giving up Google or any other major search engine. Since Dogpile is a metasearch engine, it returns the top results from a variety of the most frequently used sites, such as Google, Yahoo, and AltaVista. Two, when results are generated, Dogpile provides a convenient list of subcate-

gories to help you refine your search.

For example, when I search for "e-learning," Dogpile retrieves a modest 83 results, but it also returns helpful subcategories such as "Courses," "Distance Learning," and "Design, Software" that provide a welcome depth to my query.

Dogpile's playful approach belies the serious technology that goes into generating results, so don't let Arfie's (Dogpile's mascot) tail wagging discourage you. Even dyed-in-the-wool cat lovers will appreciate his ability to fetch. He's even happy to return music and multimedia files—something Google does begrudgingly.

Quick TIP

Unless you have your computers running safely behind a firewall, accessing the Internet while downloading the latest Windows update can be risky. Even a quick grab of an essential patch may leave your computer vulnerable to worms such as the infamous Blaster. Not to worry. If you're a Windows XP user, you can easily run the operating system's built-in firewall before downloading your files and fixes.

Microsoft's Internet Connection Firewall is surprisingly easy to get up and running. Begin by accessing your Control Panel: Click on Start and then Control Panel. Next, select Network and Internet Connections. In this window you'll see an icon for your current Internet connection. Click once on the icon to reveal a list of network tasks to the left. From that list, select "Change settings on this connection," which will bring up a connection properties dialogue box. Select the Advanced Tab. There you'll find a checkbox for the Internet Connection Firewall. Select and surf in safety.



Just Browsing

Thanks to reader Teresa Holden, I checked out Mac OS X's default Web browser, Safari. What an amazingly elegant, nimble browser. It's exceptionally fast at rendering pages, and it incorporates one of my must-have features along with a couple of surprises that I wish more Windows-based browsers would use.

Like Opera and recent versions of Netscape and Mozilla, Safari offers tabbed browsing, which lets users open a series of tabbed windows when linking to other Websites or typing in a new URL. In addition, there's an integrated Google search field on the toolbar, making your Google searches as easy as they're going to get.

The most innovative feature to Safari is the SnapBack button. Located in the address field, the SnapBack button sends users back to the last URL that was entered. So, link away, get lost in the Web. You can always snap back to your original page.

Just the Facts
According to a Line56 Research survey of companies worldwide, 67.1 percent have deployed, or are planning to deploy, a Web-based knowledge management application in the next 18 months.

Windows users looking for a similarly elegant browser should consider Firebird from Mozilla.org. Although it's still in the development stage, it's nearly complete, and I've experienced no glitches while using it.

Like Safari, it sports a streamlined interface, tabbed browsing, and the integrated Google search. It doesn't have the SnapBack feature, but the drop-down list of URLs is nearly as quick.

One final feature that both browsers have in common, and one which many will consider a true blessing, is aggressive pop-up ad blocking. Both browsers performed admirably at stopping those annoying ads.

Just the Facts
An October 2003 study from the Radicati Group predicts that vendor revenue for Web conferencing will more than quadruple by 2007, increasing from US\$361 million in 2003 to \$1.478 billion.

Gear

I didn't think twice about IBM's new drive-protection technology when I first read about it. Designed to protect your hard drive when dropped or jostled, it's included on several of the company's new notebook computers. Then, one Sunday morning, I tangled my foot in the power cord of my own notebook and turned to watch it teeter on the edge of the coffee table. With an Indiana Jones-like move involving a hot cup of coffee and a sticky bun, I was able to catch it before it fell. But it was then that I realized that one fall is one too many. And no one should ever be forced to make a decision between being scalded by a hot cup of joe and losing the contents of his hard drive.

At the heart of IBM's drive protection technology is a small accelerometer that detects abrupt movements. Users can set the accelerometer's sensitivity protection to park the head of the hard drive when, for example, the computer begins to fall. Shock-absorbing pads help to isolate the drive from typical bumps and shakes, but it's the head-parking feature that really saves your valuable data from being lost when the computer takes a tumble.

Pricing for the ThinkPad R50 is US\$1750. Visit the IBM Website for more information. www.ibm.com

William Powell is former learning technologies editor for T+D.

Digital Beat covers technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to digitalbeat@astd.org.