



Tech Tidbits

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Viruses brought to you by Osama, Britney and Michael

An emotionally exhausted Michael Jackson tries to kill himself. Osama Bin Laden is cornered and killed during a desperate shootout. Britney Spears gives birth to triplets.

Time was when e-mail messages of breaking news and gossip came from friends and colleagues. But IT security companies report spammers and hackers are increasingly, and alarmingly, the source.

Recently, hackers attempting to seize control of PCs and networks e-mailed several hundred versions of the Michael Jackson "suicide" story around the world, according to security vendor Sophos. (See: Sophos.com).

And Panda Labs has released its top 10 list of celebrities whose names are used the most to spread malware. Number 1: Britney Spears. (See: Pandasoftware.com).

Typically, the e-mails contain links to read more or look at celebrity pictures. Upon clicking, a user is told the page is busy. But that click begins a covert attempt to download malicious software that either steals data or takes control of businesses' IT resources. As an example, Panda Labs reported some of the Michael Jackson e-mails were particularly devious, employing four combinations of worms or trojans.

The hackers' concept is simple on the surface, but can be complex in delivery, thus requiring expert analysis to determine if properly configured, long-term IT defenses are in place to combat when employees innocently click on the wrong link.

IT monitoring of employees rising

Wary of rising litigation and security risks from the Internet, e-mail and instant messaging, American firms now monitor employee usage of those technologies more than ever before, a survey shows.

About three of four companies monitor employee web surfing, while 65 percent block inappropriate Internet use with software, a 27 percent increase since 2001, according to the poll of 526 companies.

Conducted by the American Management Association and The ePolicy Institute, The 2005 Electronic Monitoring & Surveillance Survey also found:

- ◆ 36 percent of respondents track employee keystrokes and time spent at the keyboard;
- ◆ 50 percent store/review worker computer files;
- ◆ 55 percent retain/review e-mail messages.

Commenting on the survey results, ePolicy Institute Executive Director Nancy Flynn said more companies realize it's smart business, not Big Brother tactics, to monitor. "Workers' e-mail and Internet content create business records that are the electronic equivalent of DNA evidence," she said.

But Neil Hardy, technical director of Independent Network Consultants, cautioned that rather than merely rushing to purchase software, companies need to inform employees of monitoring through clear, well written IT policies. Those policies should be crafted, said Hardy, to reflect realistic IT usage and be in line with the technology choices companies make.