



THE RHODENIZER REPORT

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THE TAKE-AWAY POINTS:

- Microsoft to release one last update for XP.
- Internet security is a community effort.
- Failure to secure your PC could leave you liable for damages.
- Cliff wants to see it snow again.

GOOD NEWS FOR WINDOWS XP USERS

Just scheduled for release in 2008, Service Pack 3 for Windows XP Pro and Home Editions will soon be offered as a free download from Microsoft that some are claiming will actually boost your PC's performance.

Devil Mountain Software, which earlier last month claimed Windows Vista SP1 was no faster than the original version of Vista, has repeated some of the same tests now on the upcoming Windows XP SP3. "We were pleasantly surprised to discover that SP3 delivers a measurable performance boost to this aging desktop operating system," said Craig Barth, Devil Mountain's CTO, in a blog post. Performance testing was done on a 2Ghz Intel Core 2 Duo laptop with 1GB of RAM and Office

2007 (the same unit used in Vista versus Vista SP1 tests earlier). Results showed a 10% speed increase under XP with SP3 when compared to the current version of XP SP2.

"Since SP3 was supposed to be mostly a bug-fix/patch consolidation release, the unexpected speed boost comes as a nice bonus," Barth said. "In fact, XP SP3 is shaping up to be a "must-have" update for the majority of PC users who are still running Windows XP." Microsoft Office 2007 performance benchmarks also revealed that Windows XP SP3 tested considerably faster than Vista.

On a personal note: The fact that Vista runs slower than XP was not a surprise. Every new



Microsoft O/S has been comparatively slower than the version it replaced. I've seen it with NT, 2000, and XP. Each new version needs more memory and a faster processor to run properly. With increasing speed and capacity, each new generation of hardware absorbs the difference. The real news here is that Microsoft is releasing one last Service Pack for XP that should help extend its useful life a few more years.—C. R.

POLICE ARREST MALWARE CULPRITS

New Zealand police, in cooperation with the FBI, have arrested an 18-year-old suspected ring-leader of an international group of hackers responsible for creating a "botnet" that infected more than 1 million PC's worldwide. Police say he designed a unique virus that is undetectable by anti-virus software.

"This is viewed by the FBI as being very sophisticated malware.", said Insp. Peter Devoy.

Botnets are networks of remotely controlled PC's infected with malware, viruses, and spyware - without the owner's knowledge. These are then covertly used over the Internet

for denial of service attacks (DDoS), collecting bank account info, and identity theft activities.

Devoy said their suspect is believed to be a co-conspirator in a DDoS attack at a Philadelphia university in Feb. 2006. The FBI launched an investigation which led them to (cont. P. 2)

POLICE ARREST MALWARE CULPRITS (CONT.)

(cont. from P. 1) Ryan Goldstein, 21. Goldstein was indicted Nov. 1st for botnet-related activity that caused the attack, the FBI reported. During this investigation, the FBI was able to find and neutralize part of the botnet.

The New Zealand suspect is believed to have been in cahoots with Goldstein in the U.S., using malware to crash the Philadelphia server and deny access to 4,300 students and faculty members.

The FBI has also been working on what it calls "Operation Bot Roast," announced last June. Eight persons have since been indicted, plead guilty, and were sentenced for crimes related to botnet activity. Also, 13 search warrants have been served in the U.S. and overseas by law enforcement. The FBI reports Operation Bot Roast has uncovered more than a million infected computers costing victims over \$20 million.

"The public can play a part in thwarting botnet activity," said FBI's Cyber Division Assistant Director James Finch. "Practicing strong computer security habits such as updating anti-virus software, using a firewall, strong passwords, and good e-mail and Web security practices are as basic as putting locks on your doors and windows. Otherwise, criminal botnets and possibly terrorist related activity will continue to flourish."



PC NEGLIGENCE COULD LAND YOU IN COURT

Did you know you can be held responsible for damage your PC causes, or is used to cause, if it can be shown that you failed to take reasonable precautions to secure it? This means that if you knew the dangers of viruses, spyware, and other malware on your PC yet failed to do anything about it, you could be sued, or even prosecuted, if your PC is found to have been used in criminal activities.

It would be no different than if you left a firearm in an unlocked cabinet in your open garage. Even if you never gave anyone permission to use it, you could share culpability in crimes committed by the person who found and used it as a result of your negligence.

Most people don't really understand how their computer participates on the Internet. Many believe antivirus software protects them from anything bad that could happen. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Some viruses have been found that specifically attack popular antivirus programs like McAfee and Norton. Once unleashed inside your PC, these programs silently disable the antivirus program and establish a base of operation. They then call-in for further orders via the Internet. Meanwhile, the antivirus program appears normal to the user.

The only way to detect and remove these viruses is to scan the PC with another

antivirus program that has not been compromised. Even then, some threats cannot be detected and removed easily.

Root kits are a new way of hiding a running process from other programs. Unlike viruses, these are not files that can be repaired or deleted. They alter the very core of the operating system and live on inside those files. Antivirus programs cannot detect root kits. A special tool is required and removal usually involves a total rebuild.

What can you do? AVG offers a free root kit scanner, and a new AntiMalware product that I highly recommend. You can download these from the links provided on the "Cliff's Pick's" page of my website, or call me for more info. C. R.



"... you could be sued, or even prosecuted, if your PC is found to have been used in criminal activities."

QUESTIONS FROM THE INBOX

Q— “I’ve been reading so many negative things about Windows Vista. What other choices do I have when buying a new PC?”

A— A few PC manufacturers (like Dell) still offer select models of laptops and desktops in Windows XP Home or XP Professional. Microsoft has also extended the “end-of-life” deadline for XP now into mid 2008.

One alternative would be to buy used/refurbished PC’s or laptops that are only 2 to 4 years old. Ones that have been completely reloaded with only the operating system (usually Windows XP Professional) and fully updated with all the critical service packs and updates from Microsoft. Lately, I’ve seen some great systems on ebay, and at a local computer place going for \$280—\$350.

Before you wince at the idea of “used” just remember you can get a new mouse, keyboard, and monitor to go with it if you like the smell of new plastic. But, just because it’s a Pentium 4 and a few years old doesn’t mean it can’t perform perfectly well for your needs—and still have a long life of usefulness left.

Another alternative would be to consider new computers with a different operating system like Linux, or Mac. The biggest deciding factors for this path is: A). Will it run

the applications I need to use, or equivalent applications that will let me accomplish the same things?, and B). Am I willing to go through the learning curve on something that will be different and completely new to me?

Here are some “words of wisdom” on this subject to help guide you: Business needs determine which applications to choose from. Application needs determine which operating systems to choose from. Consider your choices in this order to arrive at the best decision.

Q— “Is there anything I can do to speed up my slow PC?”

A— Yes. Check out the “Video Tips” section of my website for ways to increase the performance of your computer.

Q— “Is there some kind of maintenance I should be doing to my PC’s and server on a regular basis?”

A— Yes. Unless you have configured these things to run automatically for you.

1). Download and install all “critical” updates from Microsoft (open Internet Explorer, click “Tools”, then “Windows Update”. Those listed in the “critical” category must not be ignored. As new threats, problems, or vulnerabilities are discovered, patches or

updates are created to address these concerns and help keep your PC safe.

2). Check to make sure your AntiVirus and AntiSpyware protection is being updated and has not expired.

3). Make sure your important files are being backed up and that they can be restored if needed. Test this to be sure.

4). Run the Disk Defragmenter (“Start”, then “Programs”, then “Accessories”, then “System Tools”) on your “C:” drive monthly to keep disk performance from degrading.

Q— “Just out of curiosity, what brand of computer do you buy for your own use?”

A— I haven’t bought a computer for my own use since 1996. It cost so much I decided to build the next one myself and saved \$200. Since then, I’ve built several PC’s with discounted parts from various sources.

In today’s market, however, I can buy a system cheaper than it would cost me to build it. Building another one now would only be for the fun of it.

Send your questions to:
questions@rhodenizer.com

If we use your question in one of our newsletters, we’ll send you a free Rhodenizer IT stainless steel travel mug.



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DREAMING OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS

As Christmas approaches and the weather turns cooler, I'm reminded of my years as a child growing up in Virginia.

It was around this time each year when we would anxiously watch the nightly news on TV. Any mention of the word "snow" brought great excitement throughout our neighborhood. Parents would scurry off to the grocery store while we searched our basements to find lost boots and gloves. At night, long after we were supposed to be in bed, my sister and I would creep up to the living room doorway to listen with great anticipa-

tion as a voice from the TV announced schools closing the next morning in alphabetical order. As it got to the "R"'s, my heart pounded wildly with excitement. Sometimes, we went back to bed crying in disappointment: "it's not fair!" Other times, we heard the name "Roanoke County Schools" and jumped for joy with loud cheers of celebration. There was no need to get up early the next morning, yet we couldn't wait to get our first glimpse of the winter wonderland through our living room window. If Mom had remembered to go to the store earlier, we would

have pancakes and syrup for breakfast, a treat we rarely had time for. Soon, we would be outside building a snow fortress, stockpiling snowballs, and preparing for battle with opposing armies from across the street.

It's been a long time since I've seen snow that deep. Still, with the first flurries of winter my mind often goes back to sliding down the neighbors backyard into an icy creek on a sled with my friends. We can never go back and relive the past. But, it sure would be nice to see a white Christmas again. —C. R.



ABOUT RHODENIZER IT

We are a different kind of IT service provider. We don't sell any hardware or software. There are no sales incentives for steering you toward a particular product. We provide IT consulting services that include finding the best deals on what you really need and passing the savings along to you.

Our mission is to do more than fix computer problems.

Our mission is to help small companies save money, increase productivity, and safeguard private information.

We work with clients to prepare disaster recovery plans that ensure their critical data remains safe, yet easily accessible at all times. Benefits of such strategic planning also include money-saving ideas for managing resources and reducing IT expenses.

We have the training, experience, and know-how to provide the right solutions for your needs, and your budget.

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Tell me about your IT problems or concerns. Let me recommend a course of action that makes sense for your situation. I'm betting my time that you'll be impressed.

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