

Wildfire

By Bob Osgoodby

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No, we're not talking about the wildfires in the western part of the U.S., or not even something that can harm your computer.

Some times you will get an E-mail with a virus warning like the one that recently circulated on the web about the "A Card for You" virus.

Without checking to see if the virus is for real, many people immediately forwarded the note to everyone they know, and urged them to do the same. Many of them did so, and false information spread like wildfire around the web. This particular virus was exposed as a HOAX. If anyone had bothered to take the time and do a search on "A Card for You", they would have found the web page at Symantec which clearly reports it as a HOAX.

The only thing you are accomplishing is to frighten people and cause unnecessary concern. In point of fact, you could unwittingly cause problems for the people you send them to, like the SULFNBK.EXE Warning did. This hoax urged people to search for the "sulfnbk.exe" file on their computer, and if it was found to delete it. Sulfnbk.exe, is a valid Microsoft Windows 95/98/Me utility that is used to restore long file names, and if you use any of these Windows systems, you will find it. This caused a lot of people to delete it, and then they had to scramble to restore it.

I recently received an E-mail outlining a persons experiences with viruses, and he urged everyone not to accept any E-mails with an attachment. He has set his mail reading program to automatically delete any message with an attachment. This is an over reaction. One of the advantages of the web is the wealth of information available on the net.

Much of the information available includes files that are too large to read as E-mail, and are automatically converted to a file. These are text files and cannot hurt you, and neither can an image file.

I will not accept an .exe file, a .doc file or a .zip file and neither should you... UNLESS it is from a reputable, known source and you have specifically requested this information.

We, for example, have the Eudora software available at our Web Site and are authorized distributors. I personally have used this program without problem for quite some time, and the same software I use is available there. Does this mean you should accept files from friends - NO! They could unwittingly be affected and could pass the virus along to you.

Blocking all attachments is not realistic. The maxim you should follow is simple - don't download files unless you have requested them - but let's face it, if you receive an unsolicited attachment, be wary but don't panic. It can't hurt you unless you open it.

Rather than simply rejecting any e-mail with an attachment, you would probably be better served by first getting a good virus protection program, and then examine each one on a case by case basis.

You should automatically delete anything that ends with vbs, .bat, .zip, .exe, .pif, and .scr files. Regardless of how they may look, don't be fooled with an attachment that looks like something else. The "Love-Letter-For-You" virus looked like a text file when it arrived and it could have been thought to be one. The attachment however ended in .vbs. and arrived with the attachment name Love-Letter-For-You.TXT.vbs.

If you take reasonable care, you should be safe from real viruses. Don't spread false rumors about viruses that are actually hoaxes, as they will spread like wildfire, and cause a lot of people undue concern.

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