

No foolproof way to beat virus attack for now

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Microsoft continues to be the prime target for those intent on wrecking havoc in cyberspace, but for now the software giant argues that only it can save users from computer-virus attacks.

A slew of companies and organizations including media outlets suffered from computer-system outages for a few hours Tuesday as the worm called Zotob exploited flaws in Microsoft's Windows program.

Those vulnerabilities, however, were recognized by the software giant on Aug. 9, and it issued a patch and urged users to download it to prevent being attacked. In a news release from the weekend, the Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft acknowledged that the Zotob worm targets computers using its Windows 2000 software and pointed out that other Windows program were not at risk from the worm.

In addition, the company said that "if you have installed the update released with (Microsoft Security Bulletin MS05-039), you are already protected from Zotob and its variants." Microsoft also stated that computer users can protect themselves from future attacks "by installing security update 899588" by downloading it from a link from its own Web site.

Those who were able to download the patch were unaffected by the virus, but those who did not -- who were the majority -- were hurt by Zotob, said Tom Neclerio, vice president of security at Perimeter Internetworking, a network security service provider in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Neclerio told UPI that while virus attacks are to be expected, the gap between when a company issues a patch and when attacks proliferate worldwide is getting shorter and shorter.

"The timeframe to exploit the patch is decreasing ... in the past, it used to be years, then months. And now it hit in a few days," he said.

Meanwhile, Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at Finnish software security group F-Secure, said in a statement that Zotob and its variants Bozori and IRCbot were still exploiting the computers that had not yet been protected by firewalls, adding that "the latest variants of Bozori even remove competing viruses like Zotob from the infected machines."

F-Secure also pointed out that the "infection has most likely originated from infected laptops carried inside an organization's perimeter firewall."

For now, though, computer analysts broadly agree that virus attacks are only to be expected, and users must be proactive by downloading patches as soon as they are issued, as a completely foolproof anti-virus system is still not available.

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