

# The Web: World Cup soccer spam hooligans

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The stars are out on the playing field already -- even though the World Cup soccer matches haven't quite started. These are the midfielders and strikers of e-mail spam -- malicious messengers, and hooligan hackers -- who are hitting headers aimed at the nearly 1 billion people around the globe who will be desperate in the coming weeks for news and tidbits about their favorite players, whether it's Francesco Totti in Italy or Tomasz Kuszczak in Poland, sources tell UPI's The Web.

Nearly 12 times more viewers are expected to follow the World Cup on the Internet and TV than eyed the Super Bowl this winter, a spokesman for famed messaging filtering firm -- an e-mail goalie, if you will -- Postini Inc. tells The Web. "Viewers are more likely than usual to send and receive e-mails or instant messages about the World Cup," said the

Postini spokesman, based in San Carlos, Calif. "Potentially tens of millions of them in the next month, creating inherent risks."

Experts tell The Web that there will be an increase in spam -- especially World Cup-themed viruses, phishing expeditions and denial-of-service attacks in the coming weeks. Heavy message flows -- from regular Jose Seis Pack communicating with their mates -- will also strain computer networks.

Accordingly, company IT departments are taking proactive, preventive measures, including the following, to protect their corporate networks from this new form of soccer hooligan:

- Filtering out all e-mail that references the World Cup;
- Installing new virus filters with the latest updates on worms and Trojan horses;
- Banning Web surfing to online gambling sites, out of the belief that these sites often spread malware and spyware;
- Blocking images sent from camera phones of World Cup soccer matches.

"Increases in World Cup-themed viruses, spam and phishing attacks are already being reported across the globe," the Postini spokesman said.

One thing for consumers, who have decidedly smaller IT budgets than major corporations, is to be cautious about what kind of anti-spyware software they may use. Apparently, the degenerates who produce spyware have also started creating fake "anti-spyware" products, including Spyware Quake, SpyFalcon and Trojan.Task.dir, which are "state of the art spyware which has readily evaded detection by older and

weaker security products," according to research by Derby, England-based Prevx Ltd. "These spyware entities infect a PC, display a bogus warning that the PC is infected by a multitude of different pests and then promote themselves as the solution."

The biggest part of the con? These developers actually charge \$30 or more for their services, Prevx said. "I firmly believe this is the tip of the iceberg," said Mel Morris, chief executive officer of Prevx.

"Polymorphic malware is putting security research teams under increasing pressure to harvest, quantify and test an ever-growing number of suspicious files. Many appear to be struggling to scale."

And you thought regular soccer hooligans -- drunks and louts with bad teeth who shatter shop windows in small towns in the English countryside -- were bad.

"These infections exploit strong 'self-survival' techniques that thwart their removal," said Morris. Once infected, PCs can be force-fed with any additional spyware the hacker deploys.

The World Cup is increasing IT spending -- but it is also propelling purchases in other electronics, like high-definition TVs, because this year marks the first time the games will be aired in HDTV. According to the Consumer Electronics Association nearly 50 percent of new HDTV purchasers are citing "sports" as the reason for their upgrade.

But because so many consumers take their e-mail via cable modems these days, even these new TV devices may be at risk of infection.

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