



COMPUTERS: VIRUS ALERT

Gill Bridle considers the affect of the latest Virus Alert: You HAVE been affected by W32.BADTRANS.B@MM.

Secretary At Work: January 2002 *(reviewed November 2011)*

Since November 27th hardly a day passes without something being linked with this particular virus.

It all began with a virus warning from our Internet provider. That day I was very thankful for the additional protection which was installed to detect and clean emails before they come into our system. If a virus is detected, it is dealt with. A message is sent to the Inbox with the email address of the sender along with details of the virus – but without the original email message.

During that first week I must have deleted at least 40 emails that had been affected with this particular virus. Until then infected emails normally happened once every three or four weeks. I tried hard to contact the individuals either by phone or email to alert them to their virus problem. It became more and more disturbing to break such news, and peoples' reactions were very varied.

Which of these were you?

LEAST AFFECTED:

- ✉ Have not used email very often
- ✉ Not in other people's address books
- ✉ Have full protection with 2001 or 2002 anti-virus software
- ✉ Have updated protection (probably automatically) as soon as the latest upgrade is released

MODERATELY AFFECTED:

- ✉ Aware of viruses and their potential damage but -
- ✉ Need to be more vigilant in upgrading your software
- ✉ Need to maintain an adequate programme of computer management to ensure your system is sufficiently protected
- ✉ Many of your contacts have received an infected email by your system
- ✉ Received outraged telephone calls from those receiving your infected emails
- ✉ Embarrassed!

GREATLY AFFECTED:

- ✈ Introduced to the world of viruses and computer management the hard way!
- ✈ Rushed out to buy the latest anti-virus software
- ✈ Installed a high level of protection (If you have only downloaded free software from the Internet, do check the details. Our advice from an expert is that generally they will not be adequate to prevent a similar invasion of a new virus.)

SEVERELY AFFECTED:

- ✈ Insufficient knowledge and/or time to deal with the problem
- ✈ Employed a specialist to rectify the situation
- ✈ Computer and email facilities out of commission for some time
- ✈ Loss of productivity and/or business

Where were you in all of this?

You may be asking ‘how did all of this come about?’

Ever since emails enabled us to communicate almost instantaneously with anywhere in the world, we have opened our previously isolated computer systems to the potentially warped minds of individuals who seem to gain satisfaction from causing havoc. Clever programming and an abundance of time on their hands have led a minority to develop ingenious ways of invading the privacy of others.

According to our anti-virus software there are over 58,000 known viruses. Modern anti-virus software is designed to detect and ‘clean’ all these known viruses. Unfortunately, having one of these programs is not an end in itself. It must be regularly updated. The latest versions are automatically updated when you spend time on the Internet. Of course we are all reliant on the software companies producing instant programs as soon as a new virus is detected.

So what happened over the weekend of November 23rd?

One expert found from his research that the anti-virus software and the new virus BADTRANS.B were only produced towards the end of November. Obviously the existing software would not be able to detect and deal with that particular problem. Only those systems, which were new enough to automatically download the upgrades, were protected. So many of the individuals I had the opportunity to speak to discovered that their system had not been updated regularly enough or in time.

This virus is particularly successful, spreading from address book to address book. If nothing else it really has choked the Internet and could have slowed everything down.

What can we do with emails?

With full anti-virus protection it is advisable still to be wary of certain emails.

- ✉ Delete emails without a suitable subject heading.
- ✉ Even if you know the sender, but you are suspicious, delete it. (Check with them personally that they have sent a message if necessary.)
- ✉ Help others to be secure about opening your emails – always complete the subject heading.
- ✉ If you are suspicious, do not open attachments especially from unknown sources without checking first.
- ✉ Help others by always stating in an email how many attachments you are sending and in which format.

For further information about emails and having an email policy see Library Documents 5010 & 5011.

What have we learnt from all this?

Be prepared!

- ✉ Always install and maintain the latest anti-virus software.
- ✉ Set your computer to do a daily scan.
- ✉ Scan ALL disks before they are put into your system.
- ✉ Create rescue disks regularly as part of your computer management routine.
- ✉ You are right to be very cautious about opening some emails.

The widespread effect of this particular virus has alerted many to the existence and real damage that computer viruses can cause. Having made us all more aware of the pitfalls, let us not be caught out again or worse still, complacent, after the experience of these few weeks.