

Parliament – SPAM

The All Party Parliamentary Committee Internet Group (APIG) which is driven by 4 MP's produced its report on its enquiry into SPAM email. Oaksys Tech Ltd was one of the organisations called to give oral evidence in August 2003. We were one of the minnows sharing the room at Westminster with AOL, Microsoft, MSN, LINX.

There were various recommendations, none of which really addressed the problem that most SPAM originates in the USA.

There were various recommendations arising, here is a selection :

- The DTI should ban the sending of SPAM to business addresses.
- The DTI should make sufficient budget available so that effective action can be taken against transgressors.
- The ISP industry should develop Best Practice procedures for proactive monitoring of the security of their customers' machines.

legislature currently supports the opt-out model.

These recommendations if enacted could have implications for how your organisation deals with security of Internet facing Servers. If your server is/or could be inadvertently used to forward SPAM you could suddenly be blocked from Internet access.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing can be an effective way of reducing costs. However it is not without problems.

A report on Research among 100 UK IT managers, has highlighted that only half of respondents have a nominated customer support team. Only 21% of respondents enjoy seven days support, just 15% are happy with the way they are handled and only 50% ever get through to a human being. Worryingly, the report shows that 65% of respondents felt they were 'satisfied' with their overall customer service. This was reflected by Linda Cohen (Gartner) in March



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- There was support for Blocklists of those addresses from where SPAM originates.
- They will recommend to the US Congress that an opt-in anti-spam law is adopted. The well lobbied US

2003, saying that half of this year's Outsourcing projects will be considered as losers by senior decision makers.

The Dun & Bradstreet Barometer of Global Outsourcing that D&B researches and publishes annually. The 2000 study was based on telephone interviews with 2,200 companies with revenue of \$10 million or

more in sales, plus banks and hospitals. Another 1,000 interviews were conducted with smaller firms. D&B drew from its database of more than 57 million companies worldwide to select its sample.

The Barometer found that 25 percent of all firms' functions report an outsourcing relationship failure within the past two years. "Failure" was defined as the termination by the client of a contract before its expiration date for contracts that had been in place for at least one year. The idea that one-quarter of all executives experience an outsourcing failure, by this definition, is most certainly a matter of real concern.

Many of the outsourcing problems arise from poor initial contract negotiation and supplier selection. There will be unrealised costs in dealing with this new business situation. Organisations forget that relationship and performance of the outsourcers will need managing, for complex organisations the cost of this can amount to 10% of the service fee. Any changes to requirements will be charged for by the service provider – this has to be factored into lifecycle budget.

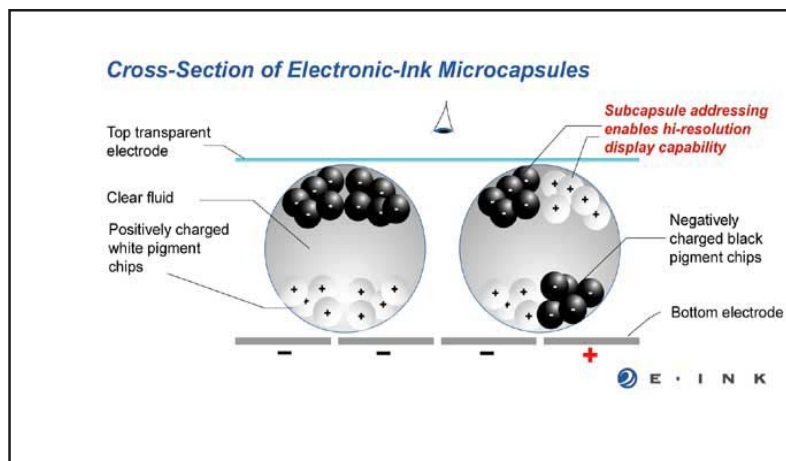
Pre-nuptial Agreement

The negotiation of outsourcing contracts is a bit like a draft pre-nuptial agreement. The bride and groom are in love and want to get on with married life. In the lead up to the wedding they are blind to the faults of each other. However when the divorce comes and lawyers get involved, both sides wish that they had thought more carefully about their agreement. Part of the planning for outsourcing contracts should be how the parties separate if the relationship irretrievably fails. Oaksys Tech can help advise on the initial contract negotiation and subsequent exit if an outsourcing deal fails. We have sample templates for contracts and service level agreements.

Electronic Ink

Tablet PC's have been around for a couple of years now. There is a version of the Microsoft Windows XP operating system tailored for Tablet PC's. However they have not really taken off except for niche applications. Oaksys Tech's eKebab™ system for fast food outlets is designed to allow the use of such systems, but few vendors have opted for the higher cost tablets preferring the standard PC screen and Keyboard.

However there is an emerging technology that could make a major impact in the field of tablet PC's and Electronic Books. Electronic Ink (www.eink.com) is a



technology that provides high contrast and very low power consumption for persistent monochrome displays. The resolution for initial products will be 160 pixels per inch. This will be similar in appearance to Newspaper print. Typically the power demands for electronic book displays using E ink technology will be hundreds of times less than the LCD displays used on Laptop Computers. The display draws no power to hold an image.

The technology has a persistent display with a low refresh rate, so for books and emails it will be fine, but you will not be using the technology to view DVD's. It is likely that where lightweight portable documentation is required – service manuals, menus, delivery

notes etc that this technology will become common place. Philips Electronics and E Ink are looking to release products in early 2004.

Colour e-paper using organic LED's is about 2-3 years away, but it will have a greater power consumption than the monochrome E Ink technology.

E Ink Corporation is a private company, its supporting investors have invested over \$100 Million into the company.

Internet Watershed

Tiscali UK has in October announced a £15.99 a month Broadband Internet access package called "Affordband". With a capacity of 150Kbs this is more a "mid-band" service than broadband. However we should take note of a couple of factors:

- The price threshold is very close to the crucial £15 a month figure that makes the service within the grasp of most households. Similar to the consumer pricing of mobile phones, Satellite TV, land line phone service.
- The connection will be "always on", providing continuous no fuss access to the internet. When someone wants to check their email or browse the web there will be no connection delay or passwords to remember.
- The ADSL modem allows connection without interfering with the normal house telephone. Dial up modem access to the Internet either requires a separate telephone line or interferes with the availability of the main phone line to the house.
- Modern IP telephony services allow outgoing calls via the desktop PC or Laptop using ADSL, whilst the existing (shared) main phone line is left free for normal voice calls.

In short Internet access has become cheap, simple to use and reliable for the ordinary person. There have been many false dawns in the prospects for Internet usage by the general public, but this quiet announcement is the start of the change.

The relatively low speed of the link is not important to most potential users of the Internet. The real clincher is that the service is "always on", with no connection delay. This is similar to "Cable TV" phone and LAN set ups, but it means that any home with a phone can take advantage of the service. Cable TV/Network has suffered from limited geographic availability.

Television Sets will become equipped with LAN connectors being able to communicate with PC's and appliance boxes such as the TiVo. This will allow recording & playback of TV programmes without the need to have separate DVDR units or VCR tapes. Adding such LAN connectivity would only add a couple of pounds to the manufacturing cost.

Ordering take-away meals, groceries, news papers, booking cinema tickets via the television or PC will become second nature to the families equipped with mid-band or broadband connections. The downside is that this makes possible the provision of interactive advertisements on your television.

For businesses one of the headaches will be providing secure VPN extranet solutions as their employees increasingly become "always on" at home. Not only are there data security issues, virus control, user authentication, business software licensing, but increasingly Voice Over IP (VOIP) telephone PABX and conference facilities will extend into the homes of employees.

Jellybean Security

At Oaksys Tech we are often concerned about organisations who's security models which are based solely on perimeter firewalls. Often this model is a hard outer shell with a soft vulnerable inner IT Infrastructure. Internet Email presents particular risks to such a security model. To quote the Wall Street Journal (29th Sept):

"If a network's perimeter defenses are like a wall around a medieval castle, e-mails are like all the messengers, traders and other

visitors who come and go through the front gate.”

If email traffic is allowed into the organisation without anti-virus scanning it is an almost guaranteed route for virus infection.

At the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Workers didn't realise when they came to work one Wednesday morning in August 2003 that little email time bombs lay in wait for them. Some employees apparently missed the email from the department's IT Dept warning them about a new version of the Blaster virus. When they opened cryptic email messages with attachments purporting to contain “details” or a response to “your document” or “application,” the results were ugly.

Engineers had to shut down all email traffic until noon the next day while they beat back the infection and updated antivirus software on more than 5,000 desktops and servers around the State. They were fortunate in having automated patching facilities in place to fix the problem (after the event!)

Once that a software Worm (or virus) obtains release within a Jellybean Security model there is little that can be done stop it impairing or jamming the corporate network. The Jellybean Model assumes that staff will not plug externally compromised Laptops into the Corporate network.

Controlling the impact of such events requires that PC and Server operating systems are updated with patches for security exploits as some as they become available. Procedures need to be in place for recognising, scanning and patching machines that were not switched on or connected to the network when the main patch process takes place.

When Microsoft released a (Blaster) patch in August the company Shavlik which provides a patch management tool reported \$350,000 sales in one day and its download server bandwidth capacity of 45 Mbps was overloaded. Details of its product can be found at www.shavlik.com

One Cheer for Microsoft as they belatedly react to their security issues where Steve Balmer (MS CEO) announced at a recent Partner Conference:

- Improved patch management processes, policies and technologies to help customers stay up to date and secure;

[Ballmer outlined significant improvements that will help reduce the complexity of patch management, including new processes for patch distribution. He announced that Microsoft will move to monthly patch releases, which will reduce the burden on IT administrators by adding a level of increased predictability and manageability. Ballmer also announced that Microsoft is extending security patch support for Windows NT® Workstation 4 Service Pack 6a and Windows 2000 Service Pack 2 through June 2004.]

- Global education programs to provide better guidance and tools for securing systems
- Updates to Microsoft® Windows® XP and Windows Server™ 2003 with new safety technologies that will make Windows more resistant to attack even if patches do not yet exist or have not been installed .

An organisation should have a defined comprehensive IT Security Policy which should include, amongst many other issues, policies for:

- email scanning at the entry point on Servers and Laptop Computers;
- Antivirus software on all PC's and Servers and the timely deployment of virus pattern updates.
- Operating system patches and the timely controlled testing and deployment of patches for exploits.

Identity Theft

In the September newsletter we mentioned the OTL article in the Daily Telegraph newspaper which described the dangers posed by spyware and phishing to Internet Banking Accounts.

A USA court case was in the papers last week (9th Oct) where it is alleged that a 19 year old student high-jacked the TD Waterhouse trading account by duping an investor to install a free “stock charting” software tool. This tool contained a key logging utility. SPAM email was used to locate the dupe investor.

The investor lost \$47,000.

Microsoft News

A Tilt Mouse wheel.

The latest editions of some mice and keyboards from Microsoft Hardware feature scroll wheels that tilt left and right, allowing users to scroll horizontally without moving the mouse. With this and other improvements, Microsoft hopes to convince users to upgrade from the standard mice and keyboards that come with their PCs and to attract OEMs and system builders with a unique feature.

Licensing

Starting with Office 2003, Office applications purchased from OEMs bundled with PC's, will be eligible for upgrades through the Software Assurance (SA) offering in Microsoft's volume licensing plans. The move could increase Office 2003 adoption among small volume licensing customers who do not purchase Office in enough quantity to be eligible for large discounts, as these customers see an opportunity to purchase low-cost, preinstalled versions of Office without losing the benefits of their regular volume licensing program. This emphasises the need for good software licence recording and control.

Purchasing SA for the OEM version of Office Professional also gives customers an immediate upgrade to Office Professional Enterprise Edition, which includes an extra application, InfoPath.

Deployment

Windows Server 2003 makes it easier for administrators to install and configure Windows and applications on “bare-metal” computers (no operating system) with minimal manual intervention. Improvements to the existing Remote Installation Services (RIS) and the addition of Automated Deployment Services (ADS) reduce the roadblocks to rolling out large numbers of computers running Windows XP and Windows Server 2003. However, until Microsoft offers a common deployment infrastructure, customers will have to learn and support two different automated deployment services (RIS & ADS).

Remote Installation Services

RIS was first introduced in Windows 2000 Server to allow administrators to deploy Windows clients over a network. Windows Server 2003 adds support for installing Windows servers.

RIS includes a tool (RIPrep) with which the administrator creates an image of a master client or server. This image is not the same as the low-level disk images typically created by third-party imaging tools—rather, it is an aggregation of all the physical files necessary for installation that can only be used by RIS. The administrator stores an image or copy of the aggregated files on the RIS server where a specialized RIS feature, the Single Instance Store, helps minimise the amount of storage needed for RIS images by automatically removing duplicated files.

The target computer is then booted with a Pre-boot Execution Environment (PXE), a tiny executable that can be preloaded from the network card or supplied on a floppy disk to provide basic network connectivity. The computer locates a RIS server, which uses information in Active Directory (AD) to determine which images to offer the user for installation (it can also automatically assign an image to the computer), and then

download that image across the network for installation.

Automated Deployment Services

ADS is a new Windows Server 2003 feature that, like RIS, allows administrators to perform network-based deployment of servers. Microsoft has designed and optimized ADS to automate the deployment of large numbers of servers in the data center.

ADS includes a disk imaging tool that administrators use to create the master hard disk images of the servers they need to deploy and a database to help administrators manage the library of server images. Administrators use ADS by creating logical groups of servers based on server attributes, such as their physical location, role (such as a Web server in a server farm), or hardware configurations.

LINUX News

SCO – in the September edition of the OTL Newsletter reference was made to the current financial opportunities in trading SCOX stocks. It was reported in the LINUX user magazine that in the period 14th June – 12th Sept four SCO executives have sold 117,100 stocks – yielding \$1,309,236 .

Version 10 of SuSE Linux will be released before the end of October in the UK. It is currently advertised in the SuSE USA website. One of the features is a version of Open Office that features a much improved ability to display characters on the screen. No more ragged edged characters on the LINUX presentation/word processing.

Heard at the Linux Expo 2003 – 30-40% of Servers now run under Linux. Oracle, Sybase, SAP and Sage all have operational releases with sizeable numbers of production sites.

Oaksys Tech is an Information Technology and Management Consultancy. We can be contacted on 0845 123 5700 or via our Web Site: <http://www.oakssystem.com>

