

Tips N' Techniques

4,677 Viruses In First Six Months of 2004

By W. David Gardner, TechWeb News, InternetWeek
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A firm specializing in the development of anti-virus and anti-spam software said Wednesday that 4,677 new viruses were written in the first six months of 2004 -- an increase of 21 percent over the same period last year.

The major viruses were Sasser, which had a 26.1 percent share of viruses, and variations of the Netsky virus, said Sophos analyst Graham Cluley.

"About 70 percent of infected computers were infected by one German student," said Cluley. The student, 17 years old when he created the viruses, is awaiting trial in Germany. The teenager has been charged with writing both viruses.

While the Sasser worm accounted for the most virus violations, various Netsky variations added up to more than 40 percent of the overall virus epidemic, the firm said.

"Reassuringly, virus writers haven't had it all their own way so far in 2004," said Sophos' Chris Kraft, Sophos senior security analyst, in a statement. "Increased scrutiny from law enforcement agencies and Microsoft's bounty initiative to encourage people to snitch on virus writers, led to a very high profile arrest in Germany."

Cluley noted that the traditional profile of the virus writer has been changing as phishers with more criminal inclinations have been emerging. And, for the first time, female virus writers are appearing. Sophos noted that a Belgian female virus writer -- the alleged author of Coconut-A, Sahay-A, and Sharp-A -- has been arrested and charged with computer sabotage. She could face up to three years and fines, if convicted.

The Sophos report stated that "tough sentencing" would be an effective deterrent to criminal cyber activity, although Cluley noted that the age of the German author of Sasser could result in his getting off with a light sentence. The viruses written by the youth are said to have caused billions of dollars of damage.

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