

Equal Opportunity Virus

Ok, so how many people out there have Microsoft Word 6? One, two, three...okay, ten. Well, for those of you surfin' the 'net, you've probably experienced the world's first cross-platform virus!!! That's right, I know you PC afflicted are out there, you can admit it. You've probably gotten it, too. I am of course referring to the infamous Prank virus! Some of you may know it as the Concept virus, but it does the same thing, namely, when you do a save as in Word 6, it saves the document as a template. Obscure? Yes. Deadly? Definitely not. Hugel has classified this virus as "Annoying."

This means you can live with it, but you should get rid of it. Because, not only does this save your document as a template, it does two rather obscure and at the same time novel things. It 1) alters your Normal template so that all future documents get saved as templates, and 2) attaches the virus to said document. This is what makes it unique, in that it's platform independent.

Yes, my fellow Mac co-conspirators, a virus created in the PC world, can and will affect you. Why? Well, why does any virus get created in the first place?

It goes like this, some Mensa type with too much time on his hands wants to make a name for himself. Now, depending on whether or not he has a Mac or PC, we are treated to the next in a continuing series of appropriate Mac or PC viruses. There are 7500+ viruses catalogued, not to mention the 200+ that are still "out there". This info courtesy of the "Center for Computer Disease Control". Now I'm sure you've heard of the Michelangelo virus. It strikes on his birthday. A man named McAfee created a whole new industry from this information. For those of you just beaming in from planet Colob, virus protection software is a billion dollar industry. In fact, we have three (soon to be four) companies with available virus detection software for the Mac. The products are, as you are well aware: Virex, Disinfectant, and SAM, with a fourth to be named later, however, it will probably be called McAfee for Macintosh. Anyway, the software of choice at Hugel is SAM, or Symantec Antivirus for Macintosh. When the whole Prank thing started, SAM was able to give us a new definition file that detected the virus, but was unable to do anything about it. Kinda like the Boy who Cried Wolf, only entirely different.

The reason for this? Microsoft believed that this was a proprietary virus! So, of course, they were the only ones that were qualified to deal with it. Our good buddy Bill constructed a

Macro disinfectant for the Macro virus. And, in an amazing display of philanthropy, he gave it away to anyone and everyone who wanted it! (Read, he put it on the 'Net.)

Problem solved, right?

Here's some history, which I'm not quite clear on. The virus was discovered around April or May of last year, shortly after Microsoft Word 6 came out for the PC. Which means, this current Mensa type was just waiting for the opportunity to strike. I heard that it finally made it to the Mac side around July or August, right around the same time Word 6 for the Mac reared its ugly head. You know, the thing that takes a minute and a half to load, and runs slightly faster than a snail going downhill, even on a 7200. So, the virus was prevalent at Huge, even before I got there.

Who leads the anarchy?

Actually, there was a lull in the action, because it was relatively non-existent for my first couple weeks there. Then, we get "The Memo", and life hasn't been the same since.

Suddenly, we're getting about 10 to 15 calls a day, just dealing with the Prank virus, or what people thought was the Prank virus. The fix was of course, to go load the Scan.Doc file that our good buddy Bill so thoughtfully provided for us, and sit back and watch the magic happen.

The prank virus contains five parts: 1) & 2) strangely named macros, AAAZFS & AAAZAO. 3) FileSaveAs, 4) AutoOpen, and 5) Payload. The Payload Macro simply contains a remark statement saying, "This should prove my point." The strangely named macros detect the payload macro, and if not present, load the virus. So, the scanner, renames the offending macros if present, and loads another Payload macro. The new payload reads, "The prank macros check whether this macro exists. If present, they do not re-install." Now, personally, I don't see the difference. However, upon further examination, it follows that they are different.

In addition, $2+2=4$. Wait, I used that joke last month. Seriously, the Scan.Doc file also contains a CleanAll macro that will do exactly that to your hard drive, as long as it's named Macintosh HD. Well, you can type in your hard drive's name if that's not what it is, and you can even ask it to go look in your subdirectories (read, "This was written on a PC, and then ported") for any and all Word files that may or may not contain the virus. Then sit back, and 30 minutes later, more or less, depending on how many Word documents you have, and how fast your machine is, you get a log file detailing the actions taken. If you didn't catch the virus right away, you may be asked to hit carriage return to the various prompts a lot of times. I know I did. This should clean your Mac, and you can go on your merry way, word processing to your heart's content.

Unless you bring a file from your PC compatible at home.

I had a user do this, and his file from home was infected, so he of course, re-infected his Mac. So, I got to go back to his machine two days later.

Anyway, to make a long story short, which is way too late at this point, the fine people at Symantec finally signed a deal with our good buddy Bill back in February or so, and now there is version 4.08 of SAM, complete with a fix for Prank infected files. The files will still be slightly infected, because you can still only save them as Templates. You might wanna think about writing a macro to copy a file to the clipboard, open a new document, paste the

clipboard to the new document, and renaming it. This right after you write a letter home to your Mom. (After all, this is the Mother's Day issue.)

MacMan to the Rescue!!!

Well, again I only got two questions this month, both of which can be answered by the phrase, "Check into the Macintosh Repair Extension Program." Yes, your 5300 problems will be magically fixed by the fine people at Apple Computer free of charge, for seven years.

So what I'm saying is, I need your Mac questions. Any question. I'll even take, "Where is the any key?" Write me soon at: Mshields@ccgate.hac.com. I get lonely, you know.

Next month: No clue. Write me with suggestions.

Macman to the Rescue!" is what Mike Shields originally wanted to call this, and he's finally being humored. Send your questions to MShields@ccgate.hac.com