

Common Sense Virus Protection

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As I sit here today, I've spent a good portion of the past two weeks hand-holding clients and reassuring them that things are ok. This latest outbreak of viri affecting Windows machines hammers home the point I bring up to my customers on a regular basis. Common Sense is your best defense against email born viri. Yes, a good and up-to-date virus scanner is important if you are running a Windows based computer but it's not foolproof. It shouldn't be your only line of defense. Let's look at 4 things you can do on the cheap to protect yourself.

1: Filter at the server

Your ISP/System Administrator should provide some level of filtering. The server is the best place to stop the spread of viri. As part of our hosting offering, we routinely reject any email that contains executable attachments. If someone absolutely has to send you a program or Word document via email, make them wrap it in a ZIP file. A ZIP file can also be scanned by a virus scanner before it is opened. Since A ZIP file cannot automatically be executed it is a bit safer. Be it an elaborate virus scanning process or simply rejecting emails that contain executables, make sure your server is doing it's part.

Remember: The server is the first and best line of defense.

2: Just say no to attachments

If you receive an email with an attachment from someone and you were not expecting it, regardless of how well you know them, don't open it. It's just common sense. If you suspect it's not a virus payload and can't resist the urge to open it, pick up the phone and call the person first. Make sure they actually sent the message. This bit of social engineering, playing off of people's sense of comfort, is a common trick virus writers use to get people to execute their payloads. It's the easiest to overcome, just don't do it.

Remember: If you didn't know it was coming, don't open it.

3: Close the preview pane

I know it's convenient but it's dangerous. The recent Microsoft mail readers are more secure in this aspect but they are still not foolproof. By closing the preview pane, you close the opportunity for code to execute without your explicit permission.

Remember: Viri can't run without you permission.

3: Switch to a more secure email program.

There are other, better and more secure mail readers available for Computer users. Thunderbird (<http://www.mozilla.org/products/thunderbird/>) started life as Netscape's mail reader. Once Netscape became Mozilla, it was moved into it's own project and is maturing into a fine piece of software. It's more secure than any of the Microsoft email clients, it's based on open protocols so you won't get locked into having to use one companies products and it's free.

Remember: The final line of defense is your email client. Use the best available.