

CASE STUDY

CYBERSECURITY

2.2.4 - Misinformation and Impersonation

Hoaxes

Article:

10 Worst Computer Viruses of All Time

AUG 26, 2008

Retrieved from: <https://krebsonsecurity.com/2017/12/mirai-iot-botnet-co-authors-plead-guilty/>

Source: How Stuff Works

Author: Jonathan Strickland

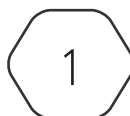
In the spring of 1999, a man named David L. Smith created a computer virus based on a Microsoft Word macro. He built the virus so that it could spread through e-mail messages. Smith named the virus "Melissa," saying that he named it after an exotic dancer from Florida [source: CNN].

Rather than shaking its moneymaker, the Melissa computer virus tempts recipients into opening a document with an e-mail message like "Here is that document you asked for, don't show it to anybody else." Once activated, the virus replicates itself and sends itself out to the top 50 people in the recipient's e-mail address book.

The virus spread rapidly after Smith unleashed it on the world. The United States federal government became very interested in Smith's work -- according to statements made by FBI officials to Congress, the Melissa virus "wreaked havoc on government and private sector networks" [source: FBI]. The increase in e-mail traffic forced some companies to discontinue e-mail programs until the virus was contained.

After a lengthy trial process, Smith lost his case and received a 20-month jail sentence. The court also fined Smith \$5,000 and forbade him from accessing computer networks without court authorization [source: BBC]. Ultimately, the Melissa virus didn't cripple the Internet, but it was one of the first computer viruses to get the public's attention.

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Article: Tuxissa Virus

JUN 08, 2006

Retrieved from: <https://www.sophos.com/en-us/threat-center/threat-analyses/hoaxes/virus-hoax/tuxissa.aspx>

Source: Sophos

Author: Unknown

On 1 April 1999, a message circulated claiming that the Melissa virus had been modified to create a new virus, called 'Tuxissa'. The message claimed that this virus, once activated, would install Linux on the target computer.

The hoax virus gets its name from Linux's logo – a penguin called 'Tux'.

There are many clues to the fact that this message is a hoax – not least the fact that the original date on the 'alert' is 1 April, the reporter calls himself 'Humorix', and the claim that the 'virus' installs Linux 'invisibly in the background'.

No such virus currently exists. Although much technical information is presented in the email to give the hoax credibility, the actual details are clearly incorrect.

Summary

In 1999, a (real) computer virus was created by a man named David Smith. The virus was spread through email. Similar to many Facebook hacks today, once activated, the virus replicates itself and sends a message to up to 50 people from the victim's contact list. Similar to a buffer overflow/DDoS attack, the increase in email traffic forced companies to temporarily stop email services until the virus was contained. Smith received a 20 month prison sentence along with a \$5,000 fine.

Following the (real) Melissa Virus, claims spread of a modified version called the Tuxissa Virus. The claim was that the virus would install Linux ("invisibly in the background") on the targeted computer. The name Tuxissa is a combination of Tux, the Linux penguin, and Issa from Melissa. The author, dubbed "Humorix", released the article on April 1st, April Fool's Day.

Questions

- Was the Melissa virus the first of this type of virus?
- Should the FBI or some other government agency use Smith's knowledge to prevent future attacks?
- Should people/organizations be allowed to "joke" about viruses without punishment?
- Should someone receive a fine and/or prison time for creating a hoax?
- Should the reporter of the hoax get in trouble even when his name is "Humorix" and the article was posted on April Fool's day?

Further Study

- 14 of the biggest hoaxes in history: <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/49674/14-greatest-hoaxes-all-time>
- FBI article about the Melissa Virus: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/melissa-virus-20th-anniversary-032519>
- Article of virus hoaxes : <https://www.comparitech.com/antivirus/virus-hoax/>