

Perkins Computer Center



hSoft Consulting

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Urban Legends and Hoaxes on the Internet –Part Two

Last month, we talked about popular urban legends on the Internet and how they spread like wildfire by tapping into some inherent storytelling mechanisms developed in our psyche. This month, we focus on internet hoaxes—specifically: virus warning hoaxes, chain letters with petition sign ups, and a well-intentioned, though ultimately fruitless, letter-writing campaign for our troops overseas.

I'd like to begin by answering something that has troubled many an Internet user: "Can I get a virus from just from reading an email?" The answer is, "No." You cannot get a virus just from reading your email—**however**, you can catch a virus by **downloading** an infected file/attachment that comes with an email. In order to infect your computer, you must actively double-click on the attachment and actually download the virus. To protect yourself: always treat attachments from unknown senders with caution, always scan any attachments (from known and unknown senders) with an anti-virus program, and when in doubt, delete the email.

While there are definitely viruses out there that are maliciously infecting countless of computers, there are often just as many if not more email hoaxes about viruses in play. It's understandable—most of our lives are intertwined with computers and to lose our computer's functionality can be devastating. So well-meaning individuals tend to forward a warning they receive about a vicious virus to help out their community. Unfortunately, it just ends up perpetuating the hoax. How do you spot these hoaxes? First, the perpetrators of these hoaxes want it to spread far and wide; Does the email ask you to forward it to everyone you know? If so, it's probably a hoax. Major companies will send their own, legitimate warnings to their individual subscribers or have a press conference. They won't ask you to do it for them, even if the email sports authentic looking logos and name-checks the right people (Microsoft, IBM, etc).

Second, real emails contain links to legitimate references. Real virus warnings will have a link to verifiable anti-virus companies, and real Target giveaways will have a link to Target.com. Third, consider the language used in the email. Is it overly dramatic, emotive or trying to confuse you with technical jargon? If the language used is manipulative and designed to evoke an emotional response (be it sympathy, anger, etc), then it's probably a hoax.

Which brings to mind some particularly manipulative hoaxes—those that prey on people's goodwill. There are countless of versions of chain letters that call on people to "sign this petition" and take action for or against something emotionally provocative. Whether it's a petition to protect children or to voice your political opinion, these petition emails call for you to sign your name and forward it to your address book. They are ultimately useless, however, (Continued)

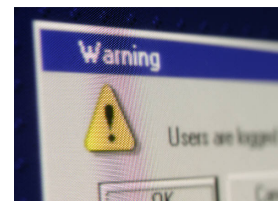
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Virus warning hoaxes lead people to believe that they are doing others a favor by forwarding the chain letter.

Touchdown! Football on your Computer

- Play free football games on www.espn.go.com/free-online-games/sports/
- Find tasty recipes for your game-watching parties at www.food.com or www.allrecipes.com
- Sign up for fantasy football at www.fantasyfootball.com or www.nfl.com/fantasy

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since names can be faked and hard to verify. Because of this, organizations are unlikely to take them seriously and the point of the email is rendered moot. Email petitions can also contain false information and if forwarded, can be a collection of email addresses ripe for another series of spam. If you have a legitimate concern about a cause or subject, it is best to correspond directly with the organization or government official involved.



Finally, let's clarify on a chain letter concerning our soldiers. There is a message going around encouraging people to send a Holiday card to one of our soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center or to a soldier overseas. It usually calls for you to address it to "A Recovering Soldier" or "An American Soldier." While this letter is usually sent with goodwill, it is ultimately fruitless in its endeavor. Due to increased security, the United States Postal Service will not mail any letters or packages to the military unless it is addressed to a specific person. Walter Reed has also issued a statement to individuals who want to show their support that they cannot accept any cards or packages that is addressed to any universal soldier. They recommend that people make a donation to a non-profit organization that sends care packages and letters to soldiers, such as Soldier's Angels.

We may never understand why individuals get a thrill by passing on these hoaxes and urban legends. Many are designed to provoke an emotional response, and ironically, virus warning hoaxes spread like, well, viruses. While most are harmless and annoying at best, some are legitimately malicious and can damage your computer. Just be sure to keep your anti-virus programs updated, be vigilant about the latest technology news, and if all else fails, visit us at Perkins Computer Center for your computer service needs!



Tasty Tailgating Treats!

Spinach, Bacon, and Artichoke Dip

6-8 slices of bacon, cooked and chopped
1 package frozen spinach (or 1 package fresh spinach, cooked and drained)
1 package of garlic and herb cream cheese
1 jar of marinated artichoke hearts, drained and sliced
1-16oz container of sour cream
Salt and Pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and stir over medium heat until mixed and melted together. Serve hot or cold. Serve with chips, crackers, or veggies. Enjoy!

Tropical Pork Skewers

2.5 lbs of pork, cubed	2 onions, chunked	Salt and Pepper
4 lemons	5 cloves of garlic, coarsely chopped	1 Tbsp sugar
4 limes	Soy Sauce, enough to cover meat	Skewers

Place pork, onions, garlic, sugar, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Squeeze lemons and limes onto ingredients and stir (you can leave the lemon and lime rinds in mixture and remove before cooking). Add soy sauce and stir. Marinate 4 hours or overnight in fridge. Place pork cubes on skewers and grill. Serve with mango salsa and rice. Enjoy!



Perkins Computer Center
2024 Perkins Road
Baton Rouge LA 70808
225.293.1264

For more information, email:
info@perkinscomputer.com

www.perkinscomputer.com

or visit us at
facebook.com/
perkinscomputer



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Upcoming Events: Halloween Sneak Preview...

We're scaring up something delightfully delicious this Halloween at Perkins Computer Center!

Get your best Halloween costumes and your sweet tooth ready as we prepare for a fun, family neighborhood event.



There'll be free children's games, Trick or Treating, and many more surprises in store!

More info coming soon!