

I wouldn't need to be so paranoid if everybody wasn't out to get me

Cyberspace and, in particular, the Internet is many different things to many different people. To commercial entities, it is just another means to a marketing end. To scientific and research communities, it is a way of collaborating and sharing developments and information. To disabled people, it is a way to "reach out" beyond confining circumstances to embrace a newly wide-open world. A way to discover new and fascinating things for school children and a continual source of exciting exploration and discovery on innumerable topics for all.

To a few, unfortunately, it is a means to spread incorrect, malicious information, far beyond traditional boundaries.

Caveat Emptor - let the buyer beware. It would be difficult to find a more appropriate watchphrase for today's "wired" world. Let me illustrate my thoughts:

Not too long ago, individuals on the online service "AOL" (America On-Line), which is connected to the Internet, started what they thought was a

relatively harmless prank. They spread the word that anybody receiving an e-mail with the subject "Good Times" should immediately delete it unread. Reading the message, it said, would cause the virus to act and damage your system. Readers took this warning seriously, which is probably what the originators intended, and told several people, who told several people. The next thing the computing world knew, warnings about "Good Times" were flying around the globe quicker than Amelia Earhardt. Years later, people connecting to the Internet can still find a Good Times warning.

New cycles of warnings have since emerged. Sensing that Good Times had about run its course, some enterprising soul started circulating warnings of a new e-mail virus. This time, the catch-phrase to watch for in the subject line is "Irina." The details about the virus are as vague as with Good Times. A new cycle was born.

Beware that reading an e-mail will not harm your computer or your data. However, scan your

programs before executing them. Some data files that may come attached to e-mail, such as Microsoft Word documents and Microsoft Excel should also be scanned for viruses as some bright bulbs have managed to use the macro languages that come with that software to write viruses. At this point in time, we are unaware of any macro viruses for WordPerfect or Quattro Pro - although that doesn't mean it won't happen in the future.

Warnings should be treated with a large grain of salt. If you get any, inform your SIGNET Systems Administrator. Keep a healthy degree of suspicion about anything you receive from an untrusted source. Spinning your wheels about unsubstantiated pranks can be very time consuming.

If you have any questions or concerns about these issues, please refer them to your SA.

CONNEXIONS is published monthly by the Client Services Division (SXC) and distributed in Canada and at missions abroad to all employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. It is also available under What's New on the Intranet.

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