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Yellow card for Internet users

By **EUNICE del ROSARIO**

INTERNET users in Bahrain are being warned by experts to be on their guard when receiving e-mails this World Cup season, as football fever has not only gripped fans' attention but also that of virus creators.

As the most widely-viewed sporting event in the world takes place in the next four weeks, experts fear that material sent via e-mail could be used to spread viruses and worms that could potentially damage computer hard drives.

In Bahrain, thousands of Internet users will be surfing for World Cup information and using e-mail to keep up to date with football action.

"We urge customers to be extra cautious when receiving suspicious e-mails," said Batelco corporate affairs head Ahmed Janahi yesterday.

"Batelco has capabilities to filter out e-mails that contain harmful viruses, but just in case we ask customers not to open any attachments they are not sure of."

For more queries, customers are welcome to contact 17881111.

Virus creators, widely referred to as malware (malicious software) writers, have sent out e-mails to Internet users



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around the world bug attachments including the now widely-known Anna Kournikova and Britney Spears viruses.

Computer experts now warn that David Beckham or Michael Owen could be next.

Leading Internet content security software provider Trend Micro Incorporated has also called for caution, asking users to update their anti-virus on a weekly basis and to delete suspicious e-mails without opening them.

"Amid the enthusiasm for the competition, it is important that users maintain a solid defence," warned Trend Micro Middle East senior engineer Samir Kirouani.

"There is the likelihood for increased activity in electronic identity and systems compromise surrounding the World Cup 2006.

"Many leading brands are running promotions on the World Cup in the Gulf region that involves prizes and lucky draws - it stands to reason that someone may try to "piggy back" these brands for personal gain."

With strong focus on the opening matches and heightening tension around the quarter, semi and final games, e-mail and Internet users should not reply to "unlikely" approaches or opportunities that look too good to be true.

"Your personal data have a value to you and, subsequently, now has a value to less scrupulous individuals who are targeting innocent Internet and e-mail users on a daily basis," said Mr Kirouani.

"We have all seen recent increase in data compromise activities in the region, be it ATM fraud or Phishing attacks.

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"People should be beware of any offers of imagery, links to sites promising "unique access" to information, e-mails from persons you don't know and so on."

People are also being asked to take extra care when receiving SMS messages offering unrealistic winning offers provided they reply to the message.

"Chances are the costs will be huge and the prizes may not even be real," said Mr Kirouani.

MicroWorld Technologies last month have already noted that an e-mail currently circulating carries a Trojan virus named Backdoor.Win32.Haxdoor.in, which claims to offer a dynamic schedule of the World Cup.

Once inside the computer, the virus moves to lower the security level of the Windows programme, turns off the anti-virus software, steals information and opens a backdoor to connect through chat channels to spread your personal information to criminals.

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