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Trojan directs computers to porn sites and drugs stores

Computing SA

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Half part pesky and half part sleazy. That is how you can describe this malware that takes over your browser and redirects it to pornography and diverts online searches to salacious Web sites or drug stores.

MicroWorld Technologies cautions computer users against probable infection by a Trojan named 'Win32.StartPage.jo' while visiting dubious Web sites or downloading freebies from untrustworthy sources on the 'Net.

Win32.StartPage.jo changes Internet settings on the affected computer. The default home page in Internet Explorer is changed to www.find-online.net. It also adds a range of porn sites and bogus drug sites in the favourites folder and makes changes in the Windows registry to activate the Trojan at the system start-up.

"This Trojan can impede your Internet activity by popping up pornographic content every now and then," says Vikas Vishwasrao, assistant manager - R&D, MicroWorld. "Some of these sites offer to the user Codecs and other downloads which potentially pave way for more malware to enter the computer. A couple of them are also seen exploiting browser vulnerabilities to slither into unprotected PCs."

Porno-Trojans can lead an infected computer to child pornographic sites, accessing which is a criminal offense in many countries. Court may indict an under-trial for no fault of his, based on the evidence of Web sites prompted by the malware, found in the browsing history.

A case in point is the incident in which substitute teacher, Julie Amero, from a Connecticut school, faced several years of imprisonment as her computer displayed X-rated content to impressionable kids. A fresh trial has been granted to her after security experts pointed towards the probable presence of a Trojan in the computer.

"Browser hijackers can pose yet another threat when used in pharming attacks. Pharming is an advanced form of phishing where users are redirected to phony look-alikes of bank and credit card Web sites even when you key in the actual URL of the site directly into the address bar of the browser. Next, all confidential information you've entered into the Web site in good faith can reach straight to the malware author, who would use that information in whichever way he wants," says Sunil Kripalani, vice-president, global sales and marketing,