



A precautionary tale

Multi-talented Nigel Whitfield leaps through **walls of fire** and dances the QuickTime.

Judging by the number of emails I received – not to mention the person who approached me in a pub to say how useful my column on security was – firewalling and protection against unauthorised access are things lots of people want to know about.

In the November issue, I concentrated on Linux and Unix solutions – and I still think that for anyone considering a high-speed link, if you have the time and an old machine lying round, it's probably one of the best ways to protect your real data.

However, for many people that's not a practical solution and you'll need guidance for Windows systems. The Mac is far less of an issue – although when MacOS X, with its Unix-like core appears, people may need to reassess that. For the time being, however, even the US Army has moved its web server to the Mac, since it's harder for people to attack.

Windows users can take some fairly simple precautions, including care with attachments received via email and keeping web browsers up to date.

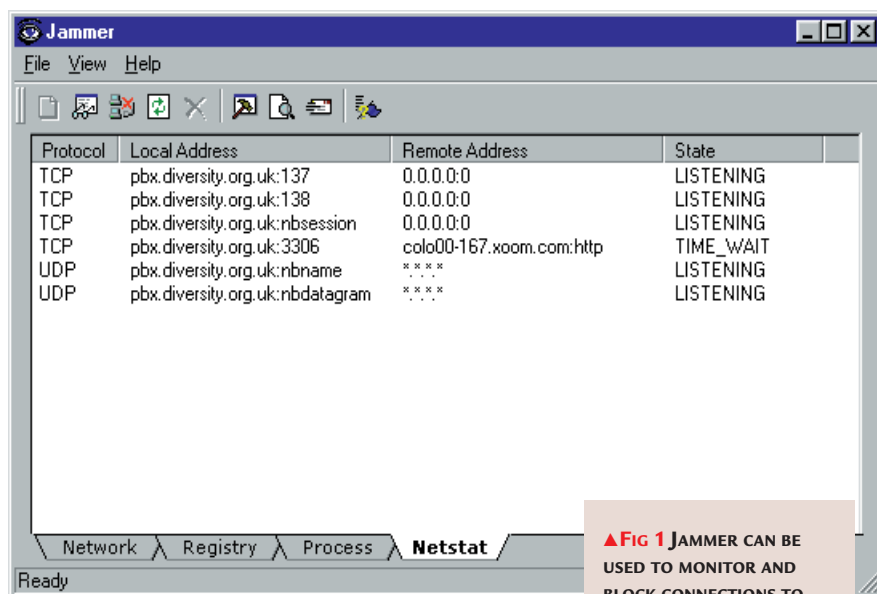
When it comes to firewalling and detecting attacks on your systems, there are a number of programs available that will help.

WinGate has been mentioned here before, and a similar product, called ComSocks, will also allow you to protect your computer and share an Internet connection

between more than one system. InfoPulse Gatekeeper

may be worth a look, too – and all of these are available for download, in demo or trial versions, from sites such as www.download.com, where a search for 'firewall' will bring up a lot of other options too.

One other program worth looking at



▲ Fig 1 JAMMER CAN BE USED TO MONITOR AND BLOCK CONNECTIONS TO YOUR PC

is Jammer, which will detect NetBus and BackOrifice, as well as attempts to scan your system, which is a tactic often used by hackers who've seen that you are connected to IRC. Jammer, a \$20 (£12.50) shareware program, can be used to monitor and block connections to your PC [Fig 1].

Most of these packages are fairly simple to install, but I may return to cover them in greater depth in a future column.

■ The QuickTime and the dead

Meanwhile, on a lighter note, for those who haven't got it already, Apple's QuickTime 4 is strongly recommended – whether you're a PC or a Macintosh user.

The recent Apple keynote addresses have been delivered in QuickTime streaming video.

However, they've

failed to do real justice to the system, mainly because it was heavily oversubscribed by people wanting to see the latest goodies unveiled by Steve Jobs.

But, if you're looking for music while you work, the quality of the streaming audio from channels like VH1 – a part of

the QuickTime TV network – is excellent, and better than anything I've ever heard from RealAudio.

Microsoft, of course, is trying to get in on the streaming multimedia act with its latest players, but it still shows little sign of catering for the world outside PC users. For true cross-platform playing, you'll still need RealPlayer, but for PC and Macintosh, I've found the best results with QuickTime, and the new QuickTime TV. Check out www.apple.com/quicktime/showcase/live for more details.

The QuickTime TV concept is simple, with a network of servers replicating content around the world. The idea is that when you request one of the channels, like BBC World, the content will be delivered from a server that's close to you on the Internet, helping to avoid some of the congestion problems familiar to anyone who's tried to watch netcasts. While that may take some of the fun out of it (remember wondering where Tony Blair's nose had gone on the Downing Street Q&A session?) it does make for a more usable system.

Perhaps the best argument for using

The US Army has moved its web server to the Mac, since it's harder to attack



Questions & answers

Q I was horrified the other day to discover that my Temporary Internet folder contained more than 3,000 files taking up over 60MB of disk space. Lots of these were cookies, but it was impossible to identify most of them due to the gobbledygook jumble of letters and numbers.

I deleted almost everything – a few files could be identified – and after a further browsing session accumulated another 400 files. What is the best way of dealing with these to prevent my hard disk from becoming clogged up? I am sure that many of us who are relatively new to the Internet would welcome some advice. Incidentally, I am using Windows 95 and IE3.

a The settings for your web browser will let you control how much space is used by these temporary files, and there's a button that will let you delete these files.

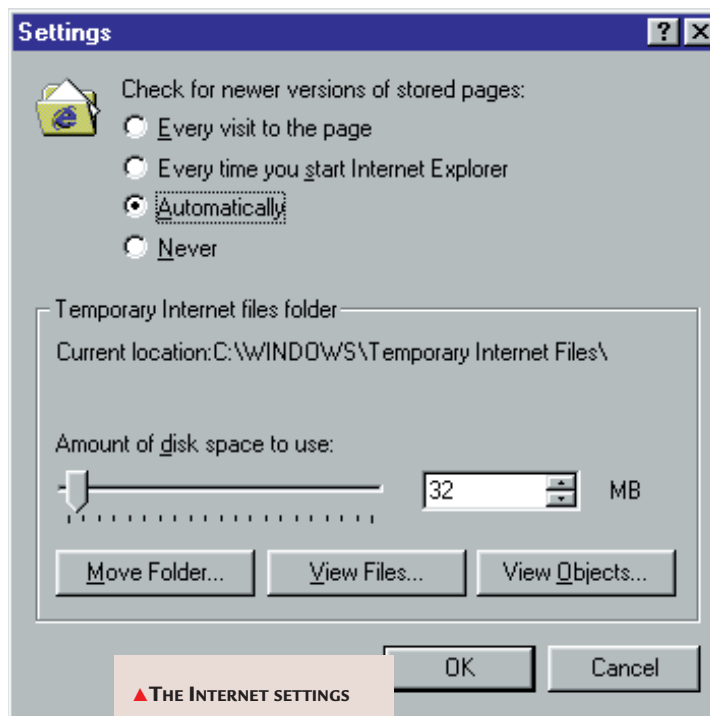
However, it doesn't actually delete everything in the folder – and some browsers seem to pay scant attention to your settings regarding how much of the hard drive they should use.

So, while it's a good idea to

check the settings in your browser, and to use the delete button to force it to throw things away from time to time, clearing out the folder manually is also a good idea. Remember, though, that if you want easy access to some sites, you'll need to keep the cookies that have been transferred to you.

Q I'm connected to the Internet at 45,333bit/sec and I am receiving about 9,000bit/sec according to the icon in the system tray. I am downloading one file and doing nothing else online and the downloading box says the transfer rate is 50bit/sec. Is there any way to make one file download using all the bandwidth?

a Firstly, there may be some confusion about the terms being reported. Some parts of your system report speeds in bits per second, while others report in characters per second – reduced by a factor of eight.



▲ THE INTERNET SETTINGS WILL LET YOU CONTROL HOW MUCH DISK SPACE IS GIVEN OVER TO TEMPORARY FILES

That aside, yes, 50 characters per second is slow. But sadly, there's little you can do about it. The limiting factor in downloads from the Internet is seldom your modem. It'll be a part of the link elsewhere, perhaps your ISP's links to the rest of the world, perhaps a congested transatlantic link, or the remote server.

You'll never receive a faster rate than the slowest part of the link – which is why many

people may be disappointed when they get their cable modems or ADSL connections.

If you have a choice, always try to download from a site as close as possible – you'll get the best speeds from your ISP's own servers. Other servers in the same country will usually – but not always, since it depends on agreements between ISPs – be faster. For the same reason continental Europe may prove faster than downloads from the US, but again it depends on which way the network links run from your ISP.

QuickTime 4, however, is that it's completely free. So if you want to provide a live feed of your company's AGM, or

QuickTime really is one of the must-have downloads for Internet users

your millennium party, you won't need to pay the licence fees – or be restricted to two viewers – as is the case with some of the competing products.

The streaming server comes with MacOS X, but you're not restricted to a Macintosh solution. Under Apple's

Public Source Licence, you can download Darwin Streaming Server, which is largely the same code, and will compile on a Red Hat Linux system. Ultimately, binaries may be available for download too, but in the

meantime, if you want to experiment with live publishing, pop along to www.publicsource.apple.com/projects/streaming/.

For those more interested in just watching, the QuickTime 4 player – available for both Windows and Macintosh, can be downloaded from www.apple.com/quicktime. If you want to see streaming multimedia at its best, QuickTime 4 really is one of the must-have downloads for Internet users.

PCW CONTACTS

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