

Companies fight to hold off growing threat of 'malware'

The portmanteau word for software that is written to damage computers intentionally is "malware", based on the same model as hardware and software, although it may be more closely related to "beware".

The term has been used for many years and it is a good one because although we often use "virus" to mean the same thing, there are very big differences between a virus, a Trojan and all the other names of villainous software that can damage computer systems.

There are many companies that track malware on the internet and sometimes the same piece of code is given a different name by two different organisations. What Symantec calls "X", might be called "Y" by McAfee, for example.

It may come as something of a surprise to know there is not only an organisation dedicated to naming these things – Computer Antivirus Research Organisation (Caro) – they have even held conventions on naming malware since 1991.

Fortinet is a company that sells products intended to protect networks from all kinds of malware and they produce lists of what viruses are trying to attack computers.

Derek Manky, a security research engineer at the company, said that last month certain types of malware



Firms like McAfee provide software to scan for viruses. Photo: Bloomberg

hidden inside e-cards were becoming widespread. "Activities in the past month showed the strength of the Pushdo botnet, which is a clear indicator that the socially-engineered mass e-card approach continues to gain traction," he said.

"Consumers should be reminded that legitimate e-cards are not generally sent as attachments, but rather as links to a hosting website. And as a rule of thumb, we should all avoid opening attachments from unsolicited e-mails."

Michael Gazeley, managing director of Network Box, a company that also sells solutions to protect

networks, said that names are not that important and lists even less so.

"Lists like these are interesting; however the reality is that by the time a virus or worm makes it onto such a list, it is already leaving it far too late to get effective protection in place against that threat," he said.

As of late this month, Mr Gazeley said his company was blocking 612,571 threats. But it grows literally by the minute.

"Like any good doctor it is essential to be in a position to deal with as many viruses as possible, not just the few that make it onto the malware charts," he said.