

Frightening Words Haunt Cyberspace

By Bruce A. Love

As Halloween approaches, I thought it would be fun to take a look at the creepy crawly things that inhabit the world of personal computing. I understand that computers can be very frightening for a lot of people. The terms, Logizomechanophobia and Cyberphobia, were born out of the need to document and describe the fears relating to computers and the Internet. But, it is my belief that many of these fears can be attributed to other fears and have nothing to do with technology. Step into my office, and I will explain my theory, which has absolutely no scientific or medical foundation.

In previous articles we learned about **viruses**, and how they attach to programs, reproduce, and perform evil acts. We also discussed the self-replicating **worms** that consume computer disk space and memory. Many people already have overdeveloped aversions to germs and worms, and may therefore develop cyberphobic tendencies as a result. In other words, it is actually the vocabulary used by software engineers that evoke these fears and not the technology! Other terms used in conjunction with computers sound like something right out of "Night of the Living Dead!"

In 2003, an average of 30,000 computers were transformed into **zombies** each day. Once transformed, the processing power was sucked out of affected computers, and used by **hackers** for dastardly deeds. Denial of service (DOS) **attacks**, for instance, use zombie computers, amassed with an army made up of other zombies remotely controlled and directed by sinister masterminds. Their goal is to flood corporate websites with so much activity, that they effectively deny legitimate surfers the ability to visit the site. These attacks cause companies to experience lost revenue and incur significant expenses, as they require additional bandwidth to address the growing server demands.

Do you remember the movie "Arachnophobia"? Guess what! There are **spiders** in cyberspace too! That seems reasonable since the Internet

is often referred to as the World Wide **Web**. In cyberspace (the Internet), spiders are a good thing. Search engines, such as Yahoo and Google, release spiders to crawl the web looking for websites. Their mission is to find and index pages on every website on the Internet. As a web developer, I have grown to love spiders, and I make sure that they can find their way around my websites easily when they come to visit. I have even paid for them to visit! By inviting spiders to crawl my webs, I increase the likelihood that my websites will receive higher rankings (listings) in search results.

As a kid, one of my favorite cartoons was "Casper the Friendly Ghost." You could always count on Casper to help someone out of a jam. **Ghosts** can be helpful with computer networks as well! Ghosting is a technique used to convert the contents of a hard drive (including configuration settings and applications) into an "image" and then storing the image (usually on a server or another network PC). This technique is most useful when configuring many computers in larger organizations.

Vampire connectors (or taps) are often used in computer networks to connect groups of computers to a network bus (cable). Vampire taps clamp onto cables and sink their sharp metal fangs through the insulation to make contact with the conductors inside. This eliminates the need to skillfully cut into cables and risk bringing down networks.

There many other computer-related terms that sound frightening until we learn more about them. The thing to remember is that computers are our friends and would never cause us to experience displeasure! Oh, that reminds me ... my computer is **hung**. I think my hard disk **crashed**. I may have to **terminate some resistors**. Talk about megahertz! That really **bytes**!

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