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War of the worms is a preventable battle

...Continued

"It's like leaving the keys in your ignition, leaving the car open and putting up a sign that says, 'don't steal me,' " he said.

"This is a new race, it really is," he said.

Kraft said companies might have become complacent in a year that hasn't seen catastrophic virus activity.

"Shortly after any big virus incident, businesses become very effective at consuming new patches -- they are very disciplined and there could be some notion of getting comfortable over time.

"In this calendar year that haven't been a lot of catastrophic viruses to hit the Internet -- it may be a case of, "can I put it off until tomorrow?"

Kraft said companies that were on top on their patching and security updates remained unaffected by this week's attack.

"Businesses that are being very disciplined about consuming those patches and applying them won't have a problem," he said.

Stephen McWilliam, vice-president, channels with Fusepoint Managed Services, said patch management is something some companies "just never get around to."

"This was one of those events that was highly predictable and preventable," he said. "This was completely avoidable for all those companies."

McWilliam said in the past, companies have had more time to react to

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vulnerabilities and patches associated with them, but that lag time is shrinking.

"It has gone from having six months to get your act together to, you have days," he said. "We think you'll see headlines in six months to a year that you have zero days (between vulnerability and exploits)."

"We are shocked by the number of Canadian companies that don't take this seriously."

The BMO Financial Group, CIBC and Bell were among major organizations hit by the worm.

Ralph Marranca, spokesperson for BMO Financial Group, said none of the institution's customers were impacted.

"We were able to manage it," he said. "We are still updating all patching and things appropriately."

Asked how the worm could successfully infiltrate the banks networks despite its security, Marranca said it would be unfair to characterize the breach as being due to patches or security updates not being made in time to stop the worm.

"It is not the case, the fact of the matter is we got through this without any disruption of service," he said. "You have to accept that your IT people will make decisions about what gets done and when."

CIBC spokesperson Rob McLeod, said CIBC experienced "temporary issues in isolated parts," of its business Tuesday due to the virus. "It was resolved overnight," he said. "It was business as usual today. Our customer service operations were largely unaffected."

Dean Turner, senior manager for Symantec Security Response, said with the vulnerability first published a week ago Tuesday and the exploit appearing Friday, with variants out by Sunday, companies have a shorter window to patch their systems.

"The time to exploit was three days," he said. "Sometimes that is just not enough time to patch their systems."

When installing patches throughout a network, typically corporations first test the patch with limited installation to ensure it doesn't cause its own problems with other applications, before rolling it out across the entire network.

Turner said Wednesday that the most recent account he received indicated 225 enterprises in North America had been effected.

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