

SUNSHINE

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,



Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

I have always been fascinated with the dreamlike interface of the absurd with the mundane, which I will call the Lewis Carroll zone. Perhaps that is why I am drawn to the over-commented but under-understood topic of software patents – in Alice’s Wonderland if ever there was one. The Red Queen this month is Trend Micro, a company that is attempting to assert control over the concept of scanning for viruses at the

gateway. According to Trend Micro’s patent 5623600, the “intellectual property” is describe as follows:

“A system for detecting and eliminating viruses on a computer network includes a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) proxy server for controlling the transfer of files and a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) proxy server for controlling the transfer of mail messages through the system...”

This topic has already received lots of press, and if you haven’t heard about it already, you’ll find plenty of information through the search engines. If I could add my own voice to this story, it would be to say that this patent isn’t just an attack on the sanity of the courts, it is an attack on the whole Unix philosophy.

The Unix environment, which appeared many years before this license was ever written, evolved around the idea of combining simple tools to solve complex problems. Each tool has a purpose, and individual tools are the building blocks for complete solutions.

Right around the time this patent was getting written, I was starting my own affiliation with the Unix system administration journal *SysAdmin*, and I can tell you that we received proposals all the time from real-world Unix admins who glued a few Unix services together with some scripting to build solutions that addressed specific problems. If someone had sent us an article describing an environment in which viruses are scanned at the gateway through a solution based on the interaction of an FTP server and an SMTP server, we would have gladly published it. If someone had sent us a letter informing us that they owned the idea of scanning viruses at the gateway using a solution based around an FTP server

and an SMTP server, and that anyone who tried to scan viruses in this way owed them money, we would have laughed out loud, and our readers would have thought it was an April Fool’s joke. The reaction would have been similar to the response a musical journal might have received for publishing the claim that a single composer owned the rights to all compositions featuring any combination of an oboe and bassoon.

On more optimistic matters, we at *Linux Pro Magazine* and *Linux Magazine* have been wondering for some time whether our Insecurity News page could use a burst of new energy. Some readers have always enjoyed our summary of security postings, but we have often considered whether we couldn’t be doing more to sort through the evermore complicated issues of Linux security. This month, we’re proud to welcome security specialist Kurt Seifried to page 16. We hope you like the new format. In future issues, Kurt will expound briefly on important security concerns – and also summarize some security highlights as space permits. Welcome Kurt!

Joe

Linux Magazine is proud to be part of an international group of Linux publications founded in the early days of the Open Source movement.

Our team includes authors, editors, and Linux specialists producing nine magazines in six languages. Our goal is to provide our readers with useful, hands-on information on working with Linux.

As a reader of Linux Magazine, you are joining an information network that is dedicated to distributing knowledge and technical expertise to Linux users around the world.

