Windows besieged by hackers
Computer security firm says number of viruses aimed at Windows soars by more than 400%.
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SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters)

The number of new viruses and worms aimed at Microsoft Corp.’s ubiquitous Windows operating system rose 400 percent between January and June from the same year-earlier period, computer security company Symantec said Sunday.

Nearly 5,000 new Windows viruses and worms were documented in the first half of the year, up from about 1,000 a year earlier, said Symantec, the world's largest computer security company by revenue.

The problem of computer viruses can be massive, overloading computers with messages, automatically rebooting systems and sometimes disabling them.

Symantec said virus writers and "spammers" are joining forces to exploit and profit from vulnerabilities in Microsoft's widely used software, reiterating warnings made in August by security group MessageLabs.

In its report, New York-based MessageLabs said computer viruses spread by e-mail were growing more sophisticated as virus writers and spammers increasingly collaborate in an effort to make smarter bugs and make money.

Computer security companies, like Symantec, often pick up new trends in the secretive world of virus writers and spammers by monitoring chatrooms.

"This is the first report we've done in which there is a commercial motive," said Alfred Huger, a senior director at Symantec Corp.'s Security Response team.

Huger said malicious code writers were increasingly going to spammers to sell them access to the computers that they hack, or break into.

Spammers, after forking over money to the hackers for access, then flood those hacked computers with unsolicited messages, or spam, that often advertise products or pressure people to spend money.

Symantec also said it expects more viruses and worms in the future to be written to attack systems that run on the Linux operating system and hand-held devices as they become more widely used.