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By:

[Softpedia News talks with the creators of SimWorks Mobile Antivirus](#)

Aaron Davidson, CEO of SimWorks International, a New Zealand-based anti-virus company

Softpedia News: Tell us a few words about your company, the field of activity and of course about SimWorks AntiVirus. Aaron Davidson: SimWorks is a privately held Auckland, New Zealand based company established in 2001 specialising in the development of innovative mobile applications for the Symbian platform and SyncML. SimWorks' product portfolio presently comprises its Subscriber Data Management System (an operator focused phone synchronisation and social networking application) and Symbian Anti-Virus application. SimWorks Anti-Virus is presently one of the best recognised anti-virus applications for Symbian UIQ and Series 60 based mobile phones. SimWorks was the first vendor to release an anti-virus product for UIQ phones and remains one of the few vendors to support both the UIQ and Series 60 platform. SimWorks Anti-Virus leverages several years of intensive development by SimWorks on the Symbian platform. SimWorks Anti-Virus has been available since July '04 and is commercially available through both our own site and all of the leading application portals such as Handango. **Softpedia News: What is the main difference between a PC virus and a mobile virus? As we know the main operating systems for smartphones are Symbian and Microsoft. Are there different viruses for each operating system?** Aaron Davidson: There are a number of differences between the world of PC viruses and mobile viruses:- the PC virus world is much more mature in almost every respect, the anti-virus products have been around many years and the virus writing techniques for the pc platform are extraordinarily sophisticated;- the number of viruses released on the PC platform vastly outnumbers the number presently being released for mobile platforms;- the world has largely settled on a single main operating system for desktop computers unlike the mobile world where the battle for the hearts and minds is still being waged by Symbian, Microsoft, Palm and others;- PC's have vastly greater resources than mobile phones and this impacts enormously on both the viruses that can be written for the mobile platforms and the anti-virus solutions that can be deployed to protect them;- mobile devices have a much greater degree of connectivity than PC's. PC's typically only have a Lan or dial-up connection. Mobile devices on the other hand typically have SMS, MMS, GPRS, IR, BT and serial/USB via cable/cradle. The large difference in the number of ways that mobile devices can communicate compared to PC's has a lot of implications for the development of both viruses and anti-viruses. As I often say to people "Phones want to communicate, viruses want to be communicated, you figure it out!". Viruses for the Symbian platform will not infect devices using the Windows Smartphone platform and vice versa. **Softpedia News: Your company has recently issued a press release, announcing users that it has discovered 52 mobile viruses. Can you tell us how many mobile viruses are now in the wild and what are the effects of these viruses?** Aaron Davidson: I'm not exactly sure how many mobile viruses there are in the wild at the moment. Quite a few; but mostly not in places where you or I would go. At last check none of the 52 new infected files that we identified were in the wild for example. That was a while ago now however so I suspect that at least a few of them will now be circulating, adding to the others that were already out there. Our recent press release was interesting - this was the first time that we had seen such a very large number of infected files turn up at once, which pointed to the increasing sophistication, determination and capabilities of the Symbian malware writing community. Previously we had only found 2-3 infected files at a time at the most. A lot of mobile anti-virus vendors are attempting to play

up the threat of mobile viruses (we've been accused of this ourselves but we try hard to be responsible in our press releases and can't always be held responsible for what a journalist may do with one of our press releases) so I think that it's worth pointing out that the threat is very real but for most users quite remote unless they engage in risky behaviors. If someone does engage in risky behaviors such as downloading cracked versions of applications then there is a chance that they will be infected. If they are infected then there is a very good chance that their phone will be completely corrupted and that they will need to return it to a service centre and that they will lose all of your data. For most users however the risk is still very small. We receive a large number of reports from ordinary users about infections that have happened in every-day circumstances but you have to put these into context - there are nearly 2 billion mobile phone users, so when you take a look at the whole population of mobile users even the numbers that we see every day are a really small proportion of that. The bad news is of course that if you are infected, the malware being released today can definitely damage your phone (at least in the sense that you will end up losing all of the information that you stored on it and have to return it to a service centre - no malware in existence today can actually physically damage your phone)

Softpedia News: Until now, viruses for mobile phones have only been "experimental", mostly to prove that it can be done. The last ones and we are referring here to Cabir and Mabir, have been more aggressive. Do you think we will soon see new mobile viruses with more damaging potential?

Aaron Davidson: We have been able to fairly accurately predict what was coming next on the mobile malware front. We had been predicting an MMS virus for quite some time for example and then along came Mabir, a virus that could spread itself via MMS. If one thing is certain it is that we will see more damaging malware for the Symbian platform. Symbian OS 9 will put a stop to a lot of the activity that is going on now but there will still be some 30 - 40m Symbian 6, 7 and 8 devices in the market by that time which is a big enough target to be interesting for the malware writers for the next few years at least. While malware writers continue to find new ways to cause greater harm to devices none of them are actually using any exploits to get onto the device in the first place - they still have to fool the user into saying yes to several questions before they can be installed. If someone manages to find an exploit that let's them circumvent this then the threat will be much greater.

Softpedia News: How difficult is to write an antivirus for a mobile OS, compared to a similar product for PC? What are the particularities of a mobile antivirus?

Aaron Davidson: As I mentioned earlier, PC's have vastly more resources than mobile devices and so the limited processing power and memory are all important when developing for mobile platforms. This, along with the much greater communication capabilities of mobile devices are the defining differences in developing for the pc and mobile platforms.

Softpedia News: A recent study carried out by Visiongain announces that the value of antivirus solutions distributed to users will exceed by 2007 12.6 billion USD. How do you comment this announcement? Are the mobile viruses such a grave threat?

Aaron Davidson: I can't really comment on the Visiongain report. They didn't consult with us when preparing which was amusing and we haven't purchased a copy of the report so all that we've seen is what has been disclosed in the press. I think everyone can agree however that the market for mobile anti-virus solutions will one day be a very large one. With many people switching to mobile devices who knows, perhaps it could even be bigger than the desktop anti-virus market one day. We will probably need to get hold of a copy of the report as it has been suggested that the report valued the mobile anti-virus market at something like \$700m this year. If correct then that's quite a surprise because we have a big piece of the market but didn't even see 10% of that.

Softpedia News: For PCs, viruses target specific applications. Is this also true for mobile phone and if so, which are the more targeted applications?

Aaron Davidson: For mobile malware today the game is to get onto the device in the first place. Once on the device the destructive types typically do there work while the application that they have hitched a ride on or pretended to be is being installed. So there is usually no particular type of application that mobile malware is

targeting today. The exception of course is mobile anti-virus software, this is nearly always targeted by malware writers so you often see new malware attempting to disable the mobile anti-virus on peoples phones.

Softpedia News: Another reason of concern for users is the spam from mobile phones. Are there any programs that shield the user from both threats: viruses and spam?

Aaron Davidson: We will shortly be releasing SimWorks Anti-Spam for Symbian UIQ and Series 60 to compliment our existing range of backup and anti-virus products.

Softpedia News: In the field of computer antivirus, almost everyday the companies are issuing alerts and fixes to prevent spreading the viruses. Is there a similar service for mobile phones?

Aaron Davidson: Certainly most of the companies doing mobile anti-virus issue updates on a very frequent basis and alerts when they need to also. For our part, our customers are able to set the frequency that they wish SimWorks Anti-Virus to check for updates. Once set the application then automatically keeps itself up to date - after a lot of testing we found that this was by far the best way to ensure that people kept up to date. Most people are too busy to do it themselves.

Softpedia News: Visiting your site we saw that you have also other products beside the antivirus solution. What can you tell us about them?

Aaron Davidson: Our other main product is a phone backup social networking service. I personally think that these applications are much cooler than anti-virus. The phone backup works with any Symbian phone and also with any phone that supports the SyncML protocol (which is pretty much any GSM phone that you can buy today except the very bottom of the range), it will let you back up your phone and then edit your contacts online, any changes that you make to your phone's address book will be backed up automatically and any changes that you make to your contacts on the web site sent to your phone. If you lose your phone of course you can have all your contacts restored to your phone. The social networking is really useful as well. If you're familiar with a PC service called Plaxo then it's really easy to explain - it's like Plaxo for your mobile phone. It will update your contacts when other peoples numbers change, show you how popular you are etc.

Softpedia News: Thank you very much for your answers !