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COMPUTER VIRUSES

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The term "computer virus" was formally defined by Fred Cohen while he performed academic experiments in 1983. Viruses are classified as being one of two types: research or "in the wild". A research virus is one that has been written for research or study purposes and has received almost no distribution to the public. On the other hand, viruses which have been seen with any regularity are termed "in the wild". The first computer viruses were developed in the early 1980s. The first viruses found in the wild were Apple II viruses, such as Elk Cloner, which was written in 1981 by Rich Skrenta who was a 15-year old high school student. It is widely believed to be one of the first large-scale self-spreading personal computer viruses ever created.

Viruses have "evolved" over the years due to efforts by their authors to make the code more difficult to detect, disassemble, and eradicate. This evolution has been especially apparent in the IBM PC viruses. The first IBM-PC virus appeared in 1986, it was the Brain virus. It was followed by Alameda (Yale), Cascade, Jerusalem, Lehigh, and Miami. Then appeared Zero Bug, Dark Avenger, Frodo, Whale, Iloveyou, Melissa, MyDoom, Code Red, Sasser, Trojan horse, Jerusalem. All these examples indicate that the most commonly detected viruses vary according to continent but they have spread widely, continue to appear, use innovative techniques never used before and are devastating to many infrastructures causing extensive damage.

At different times different myths appeared about viruses which concentrating rays in the center of the screen can burn and even kill a person sitting in front of the monitor. Another one describes viruses that can destroy hardware and burn computer's memory. One more attempt to kill a person or at least make him crazy is the virus ability to distribute and display colours in unusual way. But nowadays these are simply myths. Some other shoking facts about computer viruses are: 90% of emails contain malware; MyDoom was the fastest spreading virus created; Amazon.com brand was the most exploited target for attacks; virus writers are often children who write to experiment their programming skills; 6.000 new viruses are created every month; 1 in 14 programs downloaded is malicious.