

Bill Gates had a tough week

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Bill Gates had a tough week... or at least, as tough as it can get when you're the richest guy in the world. Just days after a series of worms ravaged Microsoft Windows-powered networks around the world --and made high-profile splashes at media outlets including Time Warner's CNN, The Walt Disney Co.'s ABC News and The New York Times--several new potentially damaging weaknesses in Windows software have been exposed.

The first problem, a weakness in the company's Internet Explorer Web-browsing software, could allow malicious hackers to crash or even take complete control of computers using the software. In order to be affected, IE users would have to visit a specially constructed Web site, but security firms say it's still a serious threat, and that a widespread attack is likely.

Microsoft is also catching heat over a new feature that's been included into test versions of its upcoming Windows Vista operating system. The software --currently released only to about 500,000 beta testers and software developers-- apparently comes with a built-in peer-to-peer networking feature, which would allow groups of Windows computers to automatically connect without a central server. In the beta version, the software is turned on by default. That's a violation of Microsoft's security principles and potentially could lead to security breaches. Microsoft says the feature will be turned off in the final software release.

In a final indignity, Linux activists wearing penguin suits crashed a Microsoft promotional party held at the municipal parliament house in Berlin, Germany. The protestors want the city government to use open source software, not the proprietary Windows operating system.

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