Please Help! wrote:
>
> After ordering FP98 yesterday (6/12/98), my Web Host Provider informed me
> that certain FP server extensions pose a security risk and apparently are
> not supported by them. Their comments are as follows-
> >
> “Front Page is at the nexus of many security issues when F/P extensions are
> installed on a UNIX server. The extensions are also called ‘bots (robots).
> When installed they create a common F/P “pool” which is accessed by all the
> F/P users on that server. If one knew what one was doing, one could access
> someone else’s website and hack it. We don’t want to expose you to this
> risk.
> >
> You may use F/P to design a web site that can be uploaded to our server but
> the extensions-related items (on-line forms, hit counter, etc.) will not
> work. You must also use another FTP client (such as cuteFTP, available for
> download at www.cuteftp.com) to upload your page to our server. Other CGI
> hit counters, etc. are available in CGI libraries on the WEB
> (www.worldwidemart.com/scripts/).”
> >
> Let me clarify what is meant by Front Page extentions. FP can be used as a regular HTML
editor just like any other HTML editor out there. All that produces is HTML. The extentions
refer to programs that can be run by the server. These are called by FP-specific comment tags
in the HTML page. For example, if you drag in a counter from FP, the HTML will have some-
thing like <!—webbot bot=counter color=blue style=3 and so on —>.

The FP server will read this and execute a counter program, much like an Apache server
will recognize a Server Side Include and execute the program you wrote. So if you’re looking
for an HTML editor and like FP, then by all means use it. But the server programs are a differ-
ent story.
As a complete novice to web page authoring (which is the reason FP was chosen!!?) and assuming that my provider’s comments are valid, my questions are as follows:

1) What is the complete list of FP extensions that pose a potential security risk?
   All of them. I will explain later.
2) How do I easily (?) disable these extensions and/or configure FP to accommodate my provider’s concerns?
   Just don’t use the programs as described above.

3) In fact, should I use FP at all? Is there a more UNIX friendly WYSIWYG authoring tool with similar capabilities and ease of use?

   I have used Front Page and have found it to be way to bizzare and complex to do anything simple, and way too restrictive to do anything creative. Assuming you are running Windows 95, I _highly_ recommend using HomeSite 3.0. It can be had for $80 if you get it off the internet (www.allaire.com). It has excellent tools and buttons for doing all manner of web page authoring, including HTML, JavaScript, DHTML, etc., while still remaining true to standard HTML. You will also see the HTML you are writing, and thus quickly become familiar with HTML.

4) Can an FP98 page be uploaded with something like cuteFTP?

   It can be saved as a regular HTML page and uploaded the same way as you would a file you made in Notepad. But first of all, if you don’t use FP extensions or their uploader, why waste money on FP? Second, I found their upload to be a real pain. When creating a web page, I first had to create a “web” on my computer (I have no idea what that means). They then had a very specific way of uploading which I never figured out.

   Better to stick with standard FTP programs (although HomeSite includes ability to publish directly to a remote location).
Any help that can be provided (preferably by email) with respect to these issues will be greatly appreciated. Thank You.

Since you’re probably wondering what your ISP is talking about, I’ll tell you. Microsoft is well known to be clueless about security, as until recently they were only developing home OSes and software. A standard Windows NT server will have way fewer services than even a home Linux machine, because the less people can interact with the Windows box, the less harm they can do.

The way web servers on UNIX work is that they have one main web server running, and all the users on the system have their own accounts. From these accounts, they can edit HTML files, run CGI programs, and do just about anything else. The web server merely delivers the users’ content to the world. Apache (suexec) can even run all CGI programs as the user who owns them, so no user can interfere with another. Front Page extensions on UNIX totally break this ability. In fact, by default, all Front Page files are created world writable. This is written on Microsoft’s web site (lost the URL). To fix this, they had to disable all the things that make UNIX good, like full multiuser access and the ability to run your own programs. Your ISP was most likely unwilling to break their UNIX servers to compensate for Microsoft’s incompetence, so they do not support the extensions. You can find NT servers that support FP extensions, but do not expect to have any direct access to the server or to be able to run your own programs which you write or find elsewhere.

If you have more questions, please email me.

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“Windows is an operating system, not a religion.”
- Ted Waitt, chairman of Gateway