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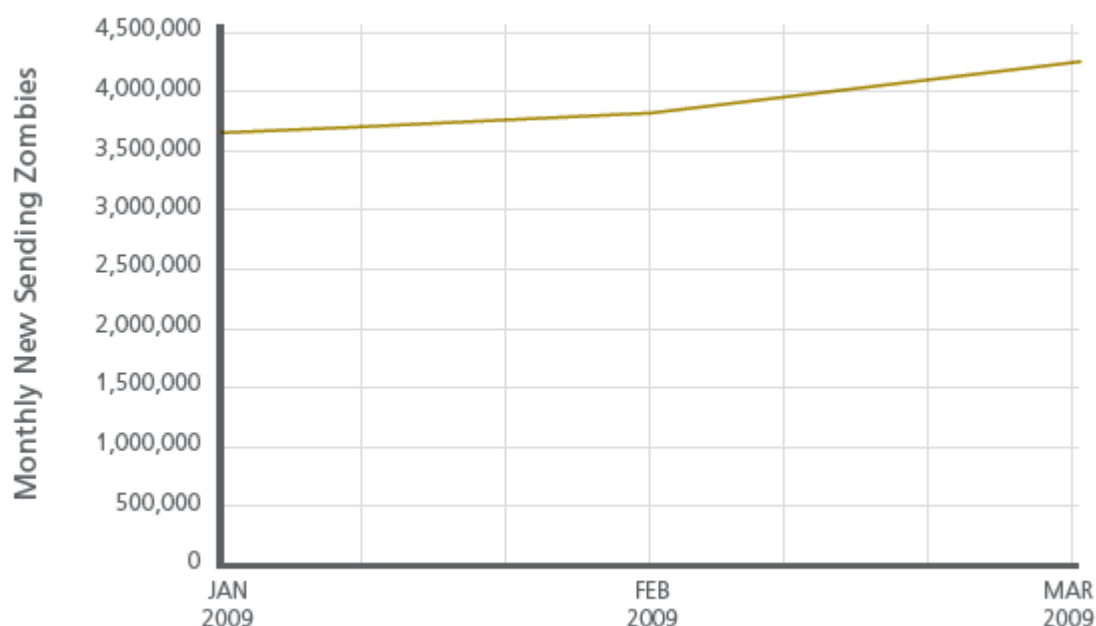
May 5, 2009 9:35 AM PDT

McAfee: New botnets dwarf Conficker threat

by [Lance Whitney](#)[Font size](#)[Print](#)[E-mail](#)[Share](#)[Yahoo! Buzz](#)

The [Conficker worm](#), which has set off many a recent security alarm bell, may just be a small fry, compared to the growing number of botnets, viruses, and worms infecting cyberspace.

According to a [report released on Tuesday from security vendor McAfee](#) (PDF), cybercriminals have hijacked 12 million new computers since January with an array of new malware. This represents a 50 percent increase in the number of "zombie" computers over 2008.



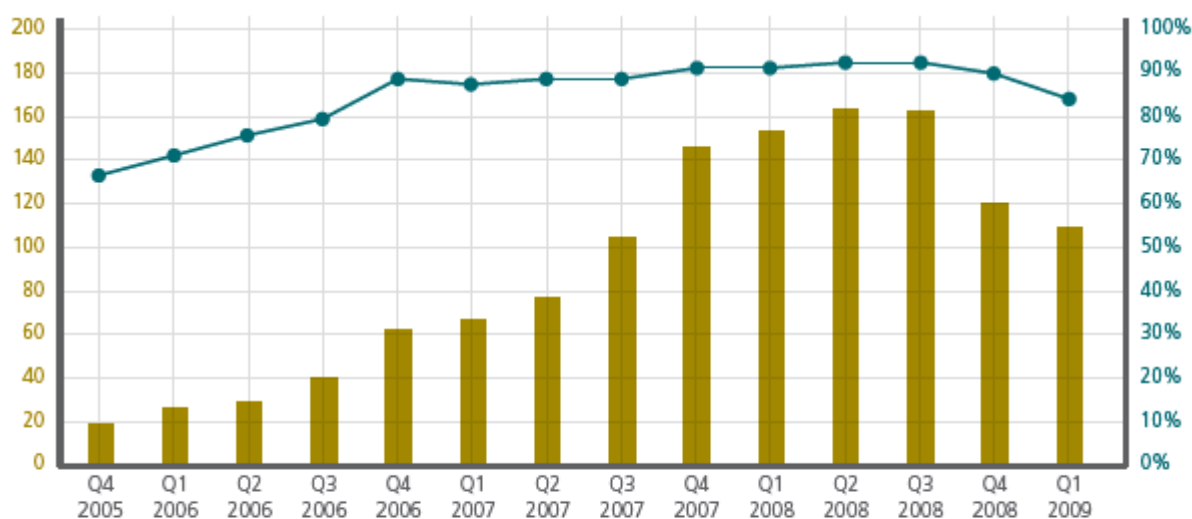
(Credit: McAfee)

The United States now hosts the world's largest percentage of infected computers, 18 percent, according to the McAfee report. China is next on McAfee's list, hosting 13.4 percent of the world's infected PCs.

"The massive expansion of these botnets provides cybercriminals with the infrastructure they need to flood the Web with malware," Jeff Green, senior vice president of McAfee Avert Labs, said in a statement. "Essentially, this is cybercrime enablement."

The McAfee report doesn't minimize the danger from the [Conficker](#) worm but says other threats that haven't received media attention may pose greater risk. One piece of malware, the [Vundo Trojan horse](#), has been especially active the past three months. Botnets using Web 2.0 technology via social networks also are on the rise. The recent [Koobface virus infected thousands of Facebook users](#), for example, as it was passed along from friend to friend.

Spam levels are threatening to rise again, the report adds. Spam had dipped 30 percent from its peak in the third quarter of 2008 after last November's [shutdown of McColo](#), a major spam-hosting Internet service provider. But since then, the volume of spam has shot up 70 percent. McAfee expects that number to grow to its 2008 level, even though spammers are taking longer than expected to recover from the McColo takedown.



Global Spam Volumes and Spam as a % of All Mail

Billions of Spam Messages per Day

% of Spam

(Credit: McAfee)

The report challenges one myth--that cybercriminals based in Eastern Europe favor Western targets. Instead, McAfee has found no boundaries for cyberthreats. It notes that key Russian and Eastern European government agencies and corporations have themselves been compromised, and that spammers are hitting more countries with worms and botnets in an effort to spread their efforts globally.



Lance Whitney wears a few different technology hats--journalist, Web developer, and software trainer. He's a contributing editor for Microsoft TechNet Magazine and writes for other computer publications and Web sites. You can follow Lance on Twitter at [@lancewhit](#). Lance is a member of the CNET Blog Network, and he is not an employee of CNET.

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