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## **Macs attacked**

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## **Apple's rising popularity attracts hackers**

By Kevin Allison in San Francisco

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After years of relative safety in obscurity, the Apple Mac is becoming an increasingly tempting target for malicious computer hackers, according to a new report published this week.

Security researchers have been aware of the threat to Apple since last year, when they detected the first piece of malicious code - or "malware" - specifically designed to target Apple.

Over the past few months, however, the number of malicious programmes has increased, according to a report published this week by F-Secure, an internet security company.

"Over the past two years, we had found one or two pieces of malware targeting Macs," said Patrik Runald, an F-Secure security researcher. "Since October, we've found 100-150 variants."

The rising security threat could present a challenge to Apple, which has long touted the security advantages of its platform over those of Microsoft, whose software is a perennial target for hackers.

"As Apple's platform becomes more visible, it will increasingly come under the gun," said Roger Kay, an analyst at Endpoint Technologies.

Apple declined to discuss specific steps it was taking to counter the growing number of attacks. However, Apple said: "We take security very seriously and have a great track record for addressing vulnerabilities before they can affect users."

Mr Runald said the jump in attacks against Apple appeared to be the work of a single gang of professional hackers. The group, known in security circles as the "Zlob gang", makes programs that infect PCs by tricking users into thinking they are installing software needed to view copyrighted video files.

As with other attacks against Apple, the Zlob gang relies on tricking users to install its malicious software, rather than on exploiting any inherent software vulnerability.

Apple sold 2.1m Macs in the third quarter, up from 1.1m in the first quarter of 2006, according to Gartner, the research group. After years of catering to a niche audience of Mac lovers, Apple now commands about 10 per cent of the consumer PC market, according to Mr Kay.

News of Apple's growing profile among professional criminals comes as the number of viruses and other malicious computer programmes loose on the internet has doubled over the past 12 months, according to F-Secure.

F-Secure said it had detected 500,000 viruses, trojans and worms in 2007, compared with 250,000 last year.

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