March 18, 2002

The Friendly Little Computer That Could

To the Editor:

Re "Taming the Consumer's Computer" (Op-Ed, March 11):

Jonathan L. Zittrain's concerns are misplaced. Computer software makers are merely acknowledging their responsibilities by improving security and trustworthiness, and can do so without the sinister side effects that he warns of.

Since much of the industry's sales efforts are for "upgrades" replacing older equipment, the last thing it would do is take power and privacy away from new offerings. Should Microsoft actually do this, it would be writing the perfect business plan for its competitors to exploit.

Should Congress try to force this to happen, it would damage the health and competitiveness of our software industry.

PETER JENSEN
San Francisco, March 11, 2002

To the Editor:

Jonathan L. Zittrain (Op-Ed, March 11) points out that making computers more secure may limit what they can do. He's right. There are inherent tradeoffs between convenience and security. But many in the high-tech industry have needlessly erred on the side of convenience.

When an e-mail attachment claims to be a JPEG photo, for example, some mail programs open it right up. That seems convenient until you unknowingly open a virus-laden executable program disguised as a JPEG.

Other mail programs examine the attachment to be sure that it really is a photo before opening it.

When Sun developed its Java technology for automatically downloading executable code over the Internet, security was a primary design criterion. To keep downloaded code from misbehaving, we included language-implementation technologies.

Security doesn't have to be an impediment to creative new uses for computers. It can and should be an impetus for innovation.

SCOTT MCNEALY

Chairman and Chief Executive
Sun Microsystems
Santa Clara, Calif., March 12, 2002

To the Editor:

Re "Taming the Consumer's Computer" (Op-Ed, March 11):

Keep your laws off my PC.
ANDREW SULLIVAN
San Francisco, March 12, 2002