

Radio Days – 2009-03-28

Tip of the Week – External Hard Drives

I had an email from a listener this week asking about external hard drives. She wanted to “*preserve my computer’s memory space but I’m not sure how to make it work*”. This is a difficult question to answer because it could mean so many things. A hard drive stores data. Nothing more, nothing less. It does not matter whether it is an internal hard drive or an external hard drive. The drive, and its data, can only be accessed when it is attached to the computer, either internally or using a USB cable, and the computer is switched on.

External hard drives can be used to increase the available space on an internal hard drive: this is like adding another bedroom to an existing house. An external hard drive can also be used to copy (or *backup*) data stored on another hard drive. External hard drives can also be used to restore data to the internal hard drive if there has been a major problem. Backup is a topic which I will cover later in this series of broadcasts.

Online Security: Safety of Search Results

This week’s talk follows on from last week’s introduction. If you took the time to check out the videos on the websites from last week’s cheat-sheet you will have a head-start on today’s discussion.

There are several types of programs which check sites to see if they are acceptable. The first is a program which checks that a secure site (*https*) has a valid certificate. The program that I know is called Vengine and is part of the Comodo stable of programs. This checks that your banking or similar secure site has a current valid security certificate. This is like the police checking that you have a valid driver’s licence: having a licence does not mean that you can drive. Unfortunately, having a valid certificate does not mean that the site has not been hacked! The whole thrust of last week’s article and this week’s one is about keeping your computer secure *despite* visiting a hacked site.

For this reason a program which checks that the results of a Google search will take you to a clean site will give you better security. My preferred example is the toolbar which comes with AVG Free, if you installed this toolbar when you installed AVG Free. Now, whenever you do a Google search using Firefox or Internet Explorer 7, you will see a green tick for good websites and other colours for other types of sites. This gives you a good warning of the malevolent sites, and helps you avoid them.

This AVG solution works in real time so does not suffer from the failings of Haute Secure, which relies on other people finding that a site has been hacked. One of the results to come out of the blog on the Exploit Prevention Labs is my knowledge that a website can have its status changed a number of times a day. This will obviously make keeping a tabs on the state of a website extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Unfortunately you still need to be cautious and look both ways when crossing the internet. It is a dangerous world out there and scams and other problems are just as prevalent on the internet as they are in the outside world.

Buyer Beware and Caveat Emptor!

Websites

Vengine	www.vengine.com
AVG	free.avg.com
Haute Secure	hautesecure.com