

Radio Days – 2009-04-04

Tip of the Week – April Fool's Day

This week saw the start of April: traditionally the day for pranks and jokes. This year was no different: I had a call early in the day asking if it was safe to turn the computer on. I thought that it was an April Fool's Day joke but no: there is a very unpleasant Trojan program called Conficker expected to do a lot of damage on that day. Conficker will happily turn your computer into a goldmine for criminals and may lead to a visit from the boys in blue.

To remove the Conficker worm you need to take the following steps:

1. Download the Conficker removal tool (see below). If you can, your computer is clean. If you can't download the tool, use a clean computer to save it to a memory stick, then run it on your computer.
2. Use Microsoft updates (see below) to update your computer.
3. Use Secunia PSI (see below) to update the programs on your computer.
4. Run the Conficker removal tool again to check that your computer is clean.

Online Security: Sand Boxes

Perhaps one of the best ways of keeping a clean computer is to run all internet programs in a sandbox to keep your downloads in a safe place. The best-known of these sandbox programs is Sandboxie. It runs all your programs so that no bad stuff can be written to your hard drive. You can, however, write to a USB memory stick then run a good anti-virus program to check for problems in your data.

In use, Sandboxie just sits in the background and keeps you safe. It is a program which you can use free. It costs €22 (about \$45) to upgrade to the full version, and this is well worth it for a surfer like me. The full version has some nice touches: you can set certain programs (like your browser and email program) to start with Sandboxie automatically. This saves you having to right-click a program to start Sandboxie then run the program.

A similar program is called Altiris SVS. This program is now part of Symantec: it allows you to try programs on your computer without the problems caused by installing then deleting many programs over time. Altiris installs programs into a sandbox, then allows you run these programs without doing any damage to your computer.

Both of these programs allow you to run an online program (browser or email) and ensure that nothing can harm your computer. There is one caveat however: a downloaded key-logger can capture your banking details. Solution: do your banking using a freshly-loaded browser in a new Sandboxie sandbox. This will allow you to bank safely.

Websites

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| Conficker removal tool | www.symantec.com |
| Microsoft updates | windowsupdate.microsoft.com |
| Secunia PSI | www.secunia.com |
| Sandboxie | www.sandboxie.com |
| Altiris SVS | www.svsdownloads.com/download_svs.php |