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Discussion – Online Security I

Introduction

In my work I see too many people who do nothing to protect their computer from the various online threats to their security. There are many forms of attack, and many can be thwarted by using a current browser and a free anti-virus program. If you are in the habit of accessing the type of site which is renowned for infecting computers then you will be well advised to consider more advanced security options.

Viruses are the bane of many peoples' lives. They come in all shapes and sizes, with many ways of attacking your computer. For most people, the word *virus* means any sort of problem program. There are other sorts of unwanted programs, and these are generally covered by the term *malware*.

Anti-Virus

I consider it essential that all people who use the internet have, at the bare minimum, an anti-virus program, both installed and kept up to date. It is also essential to have, at least, the Windows' firewall activated. There are a number of good free anti-virus programs, especially for home and small business computers. My current favourite anti-virus program is Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE). If you currently use another anti-virus program (and especially if it is out of date) then your first step to installing MSE is to uninstall **all** your current anti-virus programs. The best program that I know for uninstalling old AV programs (or any other programs) is Revo Uninstaller. First download and install Revo Uninstaller. Once you have uninstalled all your old AV programs you can download and install MSE. If your installation of MSE is successful it will automatically update itself and run a quick scan of your whole computer.

All AV programs need to download daily updates to ensure that they can detect the latest viruses. If you neglect to download the latest update each time that you go online then you are leaving your computer wide open to being infected when the inevitable virus appears.

If you are a parent whose home computer is not connected to the internet but whose children bring home devices which have been in contact with other computers then you need other ways of keeping your computer safe. These other ways are not easy to detail here so please get good help.

Malware

There is a class of unwanted programs which is not detected by an anti-virus program. This class of program is called *malware* (from *mal*icious soft*ware*) and, again, there are a number of good free anti-malware programs which can be downloaded from the internet. Two of my favourites are *Malwarebytes* and *Emsisoft Anti-Malware*. These programs both have free versions. I suggest that you download the update then run one or the other (or even both) once a month to check your computer for problems.

These programs, like your anti-virus program, need to download an update to their signature files before they check your computer. This download is usually quick. It is essential that you download the latest update before checking your computer to ensure that you have the latest signature files.

Final Check Program

There is one program which I have mentioned in the past which works in conjunction with your anti-virus and anti-malware program and that is Threatfire. Threatfire works in a

different, complementary way to anti-virus programs. It watches all activity on your hard disc and stops programs which perform activities which it considers to be dangerous. I have used it for many years now and find that it does not slow my computer down and, most important, I have not had a virus attack while using it.

This may, or course, just be good luck on my part!

Firewall

The next step up in your quest for security is to get a good firewall program. A good firewall program is essential if you visit suspect sites like porn or illegal download sites. The firewall which comes with Windows is better than nothing, but for extra protection you should use a better program which stops outbound traffic from "phoning home" with your banking details! There is a good list at Tech Support Alert: just click on the *Best Free Firewall* link under *Updated Articles* on the right-hand side. (BTW: this site lists more than free firewalls.)

Quarantining

There is yet another technique that you can use. This is useful if you need extra protection to keep your computer safe from programs like Limewire which can download viruses and other malware just as easily as you download illegal music. The technique is called *sandboxing* and involves keeping a wall around all that happens on the internet so that there is no leakage into your computer.

This involves running another program before any online programs. The best program that I know for this purpose is *Sandboxie*. This program provides a walled garden within which all internet activity takes place. The advantage of this approach is that it is much more difficult for a malicious program to infect your computer.

Are you prepared to make a small effort to protect your computer and your data?

Further Information

Revo Uninstaller	www.revouninstaller.com
Microsoft Security Essentials	www.microsoft.com/security_essentials
Malwarebytes	www.malwarebytes.org
Emsisoft Anti-Malware	www.emsisoft.com
Threatfire	www.threatfire.com
Free Firewall Guide	www.techsupportalert.com
Sandboxie	www.sandboxie.com