

Radio Days – 2011-08-06

Discussion – Online Security II

Introduction

All programs have problems. All programs which work on the internet and have problems are a rich source of opportunity for those amongst us who delight in taking what they want from us. If you are lucky they will just leave a *Foo Was Here* message on your computer so that you know that you have been hacked. If you are unlucky they leave nothing to warn you that you have a mess to clean up, and you are only alerted to the problem when you discover that your bank account has been emptied or the sheriff knocks on your door to inform you that your house has been repossessed to pay a massive debt incurred in your name.

Browsers

The program most used to access the internet is still Microsoft's Internet Explorer, merely because it is free and comes with Windows. This is still the internet browser which has the most problems of all and, particularly for those who are still using Windows XP, will remain a major source of attacks on their computer. This is because Microsoft, like most software developers, only supports the current version of their program and the previous one. Windows XP is the exception because Windows Vista was such a dog.

Another reason for switching to a more advanced browser is that standards are becoming more and more important in the online world, and Microsoft's browser is still the laggard when it comes to implementing standards. With websites using the new standards becoming available it is even more important that you use a standards-compliant browser.

Browser Features

There are now many excellent browsers, all free, which adhere to the new web standards. I urge you to download and use at least one of these browsers to see just how far the browser world has come since Internet Explorer 6 which came out with Windows XP in 2001.

There are some features which appear in all modern browsers so no mention is made of them in the details of each individual browser. The actual implementation varies slightly between browsers but the major thrust of each is the same. Some of these features are:

- Searching from the address bar. Some browsers also have a separate search bar so you can choose which search engine you want to search. Safari is the exception which does not allow you to search from the address bar.
- Rearranging the tab button order. All browsers now allow you to re-order the tabs when you have a number of windows open at once.
- Many new browsers now allow you to "tear off" a tab to open a new window. This is useful when you want to keep a group of tabs together because all the information is related. If a browser allows you to tear tabs off then it will also allow you to move a tab from one window to another.
- More and more browsers are implementing auto-updating. This means that you will not have to update the browser again. If there is an update the browser will download and install the update next time you go online.
- More and more browsers are implementing a feature which initially shows photos filling the screen with the mouse pointer showing a magnifying glass. Click on the photo and it will show full size so that you can just see part of the photo. Click again and the whole photo appears on the screen. This is like seeing a large photo in an email program and having to scroll the photo to be able to see it all.

Each browser has its strengths and weaknesses. Here is my assessment of each:

- **Firefox** is the latest in a long line of browsers starting with Netscape in the 1990s. It has come a long way, even in the last few months. It is now the fastest browser at rendering pages and has some features which make using the web even easier. One feature which I really like is the ability to create **App Tabs**: these allow you to keep a group of tabs which you always open together just one click away.
- **Google Chrome** was the first browser to have the new minimalist look. This look uses as much of the screen for the web page as possible and keep as little of the screen as possible for necessary stuff like navigation. Google Chrome is another fast browser and is also the pioneer for many of the new features like tab moving. This was, for some time, my favourite searching browser because the way that I search keeps lots of tabs open and I could move the important ones to a new window for later perusal.
- **Opera** is another old browser which has learnt new tricks. It pioneered the use of the *Speed Dial* which keeps all your favourite sites just one click away. This is just like the speed dial on your mobile phone, and another popular addition to the web browser. When you have a number of tabs open then Opera will show a thumbnail of each tab (except the open one) when you hover the mouse pointer over the tab. This makes it easy to go to the tab that you want.
- **Safari** is Apple's contribution to the browser war. It was developed for Apple Mac computers then converted for use on Windows computers. It has all the standard features that you could want. It also has an interesting feature not found in any other browser: if you have a number of tabs open then, in Windows 7, moving the mouse pointer over the icon on the task bar shows a small image of each of the tabs. Clicking on one of these images takes you directly to the tab. A neat trick which is sure to be copied by other browsers. This browser is the only which does not allow you to search from the address bar.

Further Information

Firefox	www.mozilla.com
Google Chrome	www.google.com/chrome
Opera	www.opera.com
Safari	www.apple.com/safari
Internet Explorer	www.microsoft.com/internet-explorer