Radio Days – 2011-11-26

Tip of the Week – Flood Plain, Flood Pain

The floods from the recent heavy monsoon rains which have inundated Bangkok have had an unexpected side-effect. Because of rising demand for electronic components many computer component manufacturers have built factories in Thailand because there is a highly-skilled workforce able to build almost anything asked of them. This demand for parts for many electronic items has created a computer manufacturing precinct close to the business centre of Bangkok. Unfortunately this precinct is outside the levee area so has been flooded.

This flood, in turn, has forced the closure of many of these plants for a number of reasons. The workers cannot get into the plants to build products. This is a minor problem compared to the problem of keeping all the equipment clean while it is covered with dirty floodwater.

The upshot of all this is that you can expect the prices of electronic goods to rise in the short term. By Christmas 2012 I believe that you can expect to see the prices of electronic goods return to more normal.

This, of course, assumes that the dollar bounces back to be worth more than one US dollar. The pundits are expecting the Aussie dollar to continue its drop at least until Christmas.

Updating Your Computer

This week I had a call from a client whom I had not seen for about five years. They had taken off on a grey-nomad adventure which was to take some six months but lasted nearly four years. They worked their way around Australia with a laptop for company so that they could keep in contact with their friends.

During this trip they found they could not open a number of email attachments, including the obvious ones of photos, .pdf files and movies. This meant that emails from family and friends often lost all their meaning because the attachment was the message. When I went to look at their computer I could not see anything wrong. All the needed programs were there and seemed to work, but not when I clicked on an email attachment.

Once again I was stumped.

I noticed that their anti-virus program (AVG Free) was at version 8.5: this was some five versions behind the latest one, and AVG should have been updated years ago. My clients had, for some years, carefully ignored the warnings from AVG, and from other programs, which arrived, like clockwork, every time they switched their computer on.
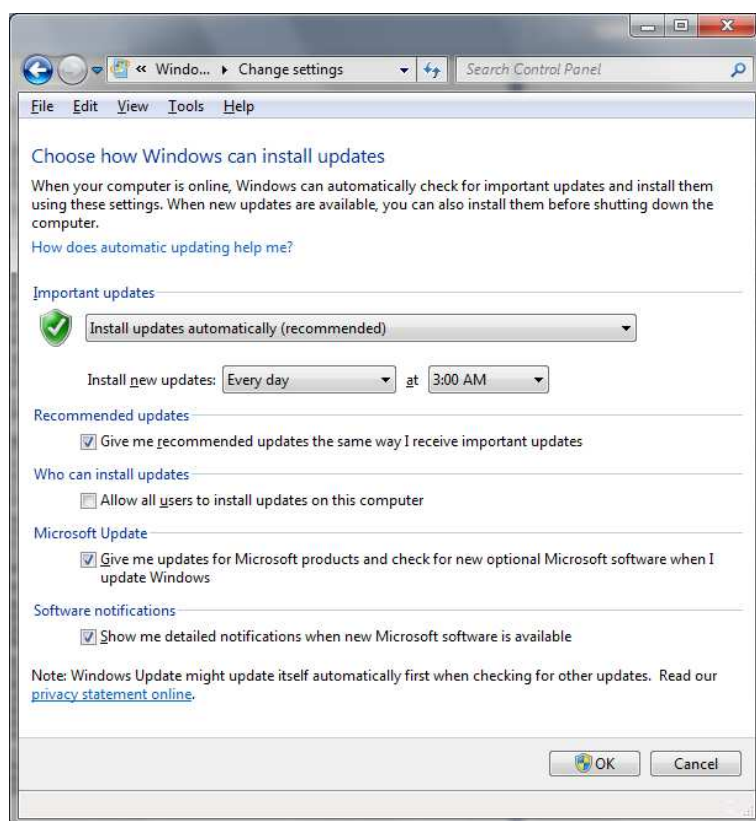
Being an obsessive person when it comes to internet security I installed the latest version of AVG Free from my toolkit on a memory stick then ran a complete check for viruses after updating AVG. While all this was happening I noticed that Windows had not been updated for some years. Their Vista computer was in need of about 250 MB of updates from Microsoft. Normally, this would have been done each month when an update had been available. Now they all had to be downloaded and installed in one hit. While downloading the Windows' update I took the opportunity to update their Firefox browser to the latest version: this meant a jump from version 3 to version 8.

The Windows download took about half an hour, the subsequent update took another 15 minutes and finished at the same time as the AVG check completed. This meant that I could reboot their computer, as requested by Windows' update. After the update I went to their emails to see if any attachments could be opened by clicking on them.

Lo and behold, they all worked perfectly! This is yet another example both of how to confuse a computer nerd and of the necessity of keeping your computer up to date.

Do I need to take this opportunity to remind you to keep *your* computer up to date? I may not say *update* as often as I say *backup*: perhaps I should!

Windows Update

I recommend that you keep Windows, and all your other programs, up to date. This is most important when the programs are used to access the internet. This access can be either directly (as for Windows or your web browser) or indirectly (like your photo viewer, your .pdf viewer or your word processing program). Updating Windows can be made almost automatic with the correct settings.

Windows 7 users click on *Start » Control Panel » Windows Update » Change Settings*. In this window most people should accept *Install Updates Automatically* as this will give them the best protection. If you have nerdish tendencies you could go for one of the more manual options provided you are prepared to ensure that your computer has all the updates installed.

Anything less can result in problems: some may be like those described above but there are other problems, including viruses which take advantage of unpatched computers, which can strike the lazy or unwary.

As well as updating your Windows you should also update all programs on your computer. Major ones which have frequent updates are your web browser (Firefox, Chrome, Opera and Safari) and programs like Adobe Flash Player which plays movies in your web browser. These can all be updated using Secunia PSI: a free download. This program needs you to perform the updates when they become available, but the process is quite straightforward.

You have been warned!

Further Information

Secunia PSI   www.secunia.com