Radio Days – 2012-01-07

Discussion – New Year's Resolutions

This is the first week back this year, so this is the time for a discussion and what better topic for discussion than the resolutions that you should make to keep your computer happy for this New Year!

These resolutions are all for the person who uses the internet as these are the majority of my clients. If you do not use the internet you may heave a sigh of relief and go back to sleep, but I strongly suggest that you remain awake to take notice. This is because you may well be called upon, as the family guru, to help somebody else in the future.

Now that I have your attention let's get started.

I will install a good web browser

All windows computers come with a web browser: this is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE). If you are using the latest version of IE (version 9 for Windows Vista and Windows 7) the top of your screen will look like this image. You will notice that I have two windows open: the ABC's website and GoldfieldsFM's website. This is a basic internet browser, and so it is the lowest standard.

My preferred web browser is Opera because of its speed and ease of use. Regular listeners will remember that I have previously recommended Firefox. This is a good browser, but Opera is still the one which I use all the time. There are a number of others: please try at least one as they are all better than IE.

One of the reasons for installing a good web browser is that this program is the gateway between your computer and the internet. If the gateway makes it easy for hackers to enter your computer then it makes sense for you to change the gateway. Microsoft has, for far too many years, ignored to problems in Internet Explorer. During this time other browsers have improved out of sight, and their security is just so much better than IE's that I have, for many years, recommended other browsers.

The specific browser has changed (and will probably continue to change) over the years. My current recommendation is Opera: please install it and be wowed by the way it works! One of its major advantages over other browsers is the way it downloads and installs programs: see the next section.

I will learn how to install downloaded programs
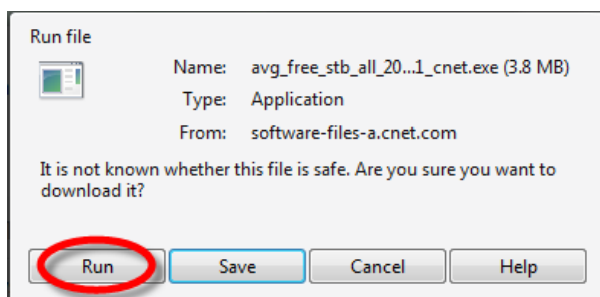
I have seen so many of my clients download up to twenty (20!) copies of a large program and still not install this program. This is one of the reasons why I recommend Opera as your web browser. This allows you to chose between saving and running the program.

For the easiest way to install a program make sure that you are using Opera as your browser then, when you see the dialogue box at the left, click on the **Run** button. This ensures that your program will run as soon as it has finished downloading.

Presto: no more hassles about having multiple copies of an uninstalled program sitting on your hard disc with continual reminders about a program which needs to be updated. This, in itself, makes Opera a hard browser to ignore. Please download, install and try it: you will be so glad that you did!

I will spring-clean my computer

We are exhorted to change the battery in our smoke alarms twice a year when Victoria changes to and from daylight saving time. I urge you to spring-clean your computer at these times each year to ensure that it works as well as possible.

The programs which I use for this process are CCleaner and Defraggler. Both of these programs are created by a company called Piriform, so they come from the Piriform website. There are other programs which will spring-clean your computer, and some are excellent. I chose to use these two because they have always been easy to use and are not so aggressive that they damage your computer.

The only problem that I have with them is that they try to install Google Chrome web browser and make it your default browser. This may not be what you want so please take care, and read the screen, when you are installing these two products.

When running CCleaner there are two sections which I suggest that you run. On the left-hand side the **_Cleaner_** button is highlighted: click on the button marked **_Analyse_** at the bottom of the screen and wait until the green bar has moved all the way across the screen and the words *Analysis Complete* appear at the top of the window. At this stage you can click on **_Run Cleaner_** to remove the files found.
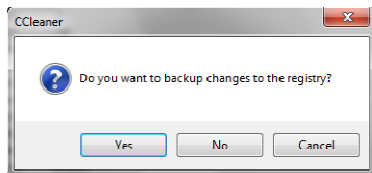
The next step is to click on **_Registry_** on the left-hand side, then click on **_Scan for Issues_**. When the scan is complete you should click on **_Fix selected issues_** to complete the scan. When you are asked if you want to backup changes to the registry please click on **_Yes_**. This allows you to reverse these changes if there is a problem. CCleaner is suck a good program that I have only had to reverse the changes once in all the years that I have been using it.

In the next window click on **_Save_** then click on **_Fix all selected issues_** in the next window. Finally click on **_Close_** to complete the registry scan and clean. Now you can close CCleaner to complete the job.

Defraggler is even easier to run. Just run the program then click on **_Defrag_**. When the defrag has completed you can close the program. Yes, it as easy as that to run!

I will keep my Windows up to date
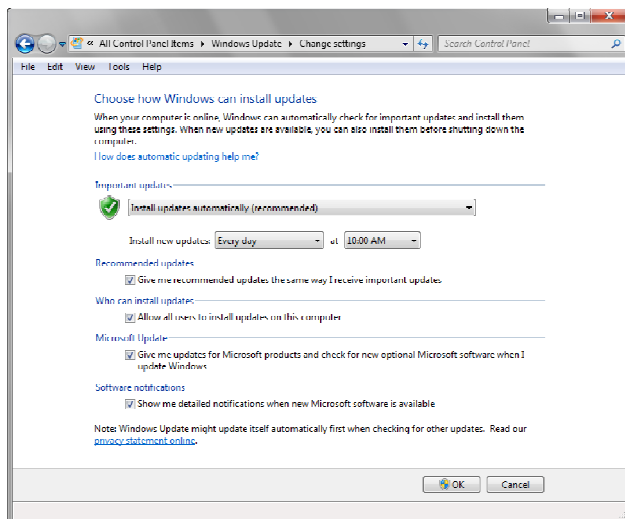
Microsoft has given you the ability to keep Windows up to date. This is because they have, in the past, been condemned for their slackness over security. Now, after all that bad publicity, Microsoft has lifted its game, especially with Windows 7. If you have not enabled Windows Updates please do so now. In Windows 7 the steps are **_Start » Control Panel » Windows Update_**. When you have done this please click *Change Settings*. You will see this screen: if you are not sure which option to take select *Install updates automatically* then select *Every day* and a time when your computer is usually switched on.

The advantage of having Windows Update working for you automatically is that you will have the best protection that you can get. The way that Windows Update updates Windows is simple, but a lot of people do not understand how it works.

Windows is just like any large mechanical device: you can see it as a large device or as a collection of much smaller parts. If you see Windows as a collection of much smaller parts you will realise that it is easy to replace just one part with another that has the same function.

This is what Windows Update does. Because all programs have faults it is impossible, given current technology, to deliver completely fault-free systems. When a problem is discovered in one part of Windows that part is replaced with a better one at the next update cycle. This process keeps repeating, with a major version of Windows every few years just to keep us all on our toes!

I will keep my computer's programs up to date

There are two systems which I use to keep my computer up to date. The almost automatic one is Ninite, which I run every month. This covers many programs but has recently dropped both CCleaner and Defraggler, much to my annoyance. Go to the Ninite website, select your programs then download the installer. If you download the installer to your desktop you can update all the programs that you selected with just a couple of mouse clicks. Too easy!

The other program which I use to keep my programs up to date is Secunia PSI (for Personal Software Inspector). The latest version is greatly improved: it does as much updating behind the scenes as possible. You still have to update some programs manually but this program has improved so much since I first recommended it.

After you download and install Secunia PSI (using Opera, of course!) it checks the programs installed on your computer and will automatically update all those programs which it can and advise you to update all the others. This is the easiest way that I have discovered which helps you to update all non-Microsoft programs.

Why is all this important?

The reasons for keeping your programs updated are the same as those for keeping Windows updated: there are a number of people and organisations out there which want to control your computer for various nefarious reasons. It is in your interests to keep your computer as safe as possible. Keeping your computer safe means that you safeguard your private data (like bank account details) and the feel-good knowledge that you are not helping infect other peoples' computers as part of a bot network.

A bot (or *robot*) network is a number of computers which are controlled by a *bot master*. These computers can be programmed to do a number of things like:

- Send unwanted emails to many computers.
- Blanket a website with too many messages which stop real traffic from getting in.
- Attacking other computers to get money from the owners.

All the actions which you, and everybody else, take to stop these actions will help every user of the internet. The internet, unlike so many activities in the real world, allows you to avoid detection by the police forces of many countries. This gives the people who want to destroy your computer, your reputation and your bank balance the anonymity which they need.

Further Information

Opera	www.opera.com
Firefox	www.mozilla.org
Chrome	www.google.com/chrome
Safari	www.apple.com/safari
CCleaner & Defraggler	www.piriform.com
Ninite	www.ninite.com
Secunia PSI	www.secunia.com