

Radio Days – 2012-01-21

Tip of the Week – Is Piracy Bad?

During this one week two interesting events happened.

The first of these is that the Swiss government decided **not** to ban piracy. The reason for this is simple: according to their research the proportion of discretionary income which was spent on music and movies has remained constant for the last decade. This, according to the Swiss government, means that piracy has no effect on the income of the American film and music industries. Their assertions that piracy is robbing them of millions of dollars is, according to this research, absolute bunkum.

The other interesting thing is that the website MegaUpload.com has been taken off air. This comes just as the American government is voting on a proposal to make ISPs responsible for all piracy which their users commit. These two events have caused a number of hacker groups to take many official American websites off air. As this has happened a number of sites, including Google and the English version of Wikipedia, have been shut down by their owners in protest at the US government's proposed bills. The people sponsoring these proposed bills have now had a change of heart, having seen the results of people power. This is the US equivalent of the Arab Spring in the Middle East.

The ability to take a website off air has been around for many years and uses compromised computers (like yours?) to flood a website with requests so that the servers have no time to answer legitimate requests. This uses *botnets* of compromised computers.

It is easy to compromise computers which are not looked after. Is your computer one of these easy marks?

Keeping Computers Up To Date

This is an essential part of responsible computing. As noted in the *Tip of the Week* it is easy to take a website off air using a network of compromised computers. Such a network is called a *botnet*, and botnets can only be created with compromised computers. This is why I ask you, and all my listeners, to keep your computer, and the programs that you run, up to date.

There is the normal hit-and-miss method of keeping programs up to date. This is the tried and untrue method which has not worked for many years. Some enlightened programmers have now written programs which let you know when they need updating. Their programs are easy to keep up to date, so more and more programmers are taking this route.

For those programs which do not update themselves automatically, and do not let you know that there is an update available, these are my two methods of keeping my programs up to date. I hope that you will use both of them and keep the programs on your computer up to date.

My two methods of keeping my programs up to date are:

- My first method is to run Ninite each month. This ensures that all selected programs are updated (if necessary) each time you run it.
- My second method is to then run Secunia PSI to find out which programs need to be updated manually. I then do these manual updates.

Using this combination of methods, together with programs which update themselves, gives me the best chance of avoiding viruses and other nasties. Yes, this can be a time-consuming exercise but, like all efforts to keep the world as you want it (including tidying your room and cleaning your car), it is worth it in the long run. The cost of trying to recover all your lost data, or your stolen identity, is much greater than the cost of merely keeping some programs up to date.

Ninite

This website allows you to download a program to your computer and then run it as needed. You choose the programs which you want Ninite to update for you, then just run Ninite once a month to update the programs which you chose.

These programs come in sections, and these are my recommendations:

- Web browsers: *Chrome, safari, Opera, Firefox*
- Messaging: *Skype*
- Media: *iTunes, VLC, QuickTime*
- Runtimes: *Flash, Flash (IE), Java, .NET, Silverlight, Air, Shockwave*
- Imaging: *Picasa, Irfanview*
- Documents: *Foxit Reader, PDFCreator*
- Security: *Essentials or AVG*

There are some other sections but, for most people, they are not needed.

Download the program from the website and place it on your desktop. Then, when you want to update your programs, just run this program and wait until everything has completed. This will normally take less than 20 minutes. Of course, the first time that you run it may take longer because there may well be more programs to download and install or update.

Secunia PSI

The latest version of Secunia PSI updates more programs automatically. This means that there are now only a few programs which you need to update manually, and many of these can be updated with Ninite.

When you first start Secunia PSI it checks that it has an internet connection. Then it presents its main screen. In the left-hand side click on *Scan your PC* then, in the new window, click on *Start scan*. When the scan has completed you will be presented with the results. Any program which has automatic updating can safely be ignored, but you will have to click on each program which needs manual updating to download and install the update for that program.

This is where the time comes in, but it is worth it for a clean computer.

Further Information

Secunia PSI www.secunia.com
Ninite www.ninite.com