

Radio Days – 2012-07-21

Tip of the Week – Oh No! Not a Virus!

During the week I had a call from a user who thought that I would be able to fix his computer. He described his computer's symptoms: slow, doing funny things and not able to run some of the most important programs which he needed. He could get onto the internet so I asked him to go to the website of a well-known anti-virus program. He could not get on. I then asked him to go to the website of the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation): www.abc.net.au. I chose this website because it has constantly-varying, and timed, content so is the best site that I know for testing an internet connection. This time he could get onto the site.

All of this pointed to a virus in his computer. I suggested that he take his computer to a good repair shop where they would be able to remove his virus and restore his Windows to pristine condition. I gave him the name of a couple of good businesses to do this.

I rang him a few days later to see how he had fared. He stated that he had not wanted to move his computer so had called a local person to repair the damage. This could not be done on site so the repairer attempted to backup all his data before reinstalling Windows onto a freshly-formatted disc. The reinstallation of Windows went well, as it usually does. However, there were many updates (over a decade's worth) which had to be downloaded and installed. This was going to take days if not weeks.

The next problem was that he did not have all the discs needed to reinstall all the programs which he needed for his daily work. Also, some of his data had not been copied correctly and so had been lost with no hope of recovery. This matches my own experience with reinstalling Windows on a client's computer: there is always something which has been overlooked.

I had suggested taking the computer to a competent shop because the technicians can do all the work without the problems which he now faced. In fact, taking a virus-infected computer to a good shop is the only action which I recommend. I will not try to remove a virus again for two reasons: the shop does a better job at a lower cost. Enough said!

When Updating Goes Wrong

I have, for a long time, recommended that you keep your computer software up to date. This includes Windows (in all its various incarnations) and the programs which you have installed to help you do the work which you need your computer for. There are times, however, when doing an update goes awry. Two of these events happened this week and took some time to fix. Both involved an anti-virus program.

There in another anti-virus program which has caused one of my clients major problems over the last few years. Each time she has updated her copy of CA Anti-virus (formerly Vet Anti-virus) she has had to ring tech support to ensure that her update works. She has now started to use my preferred option: Microsoft Security Essentials. The advantage of this program, for so many users, is that it updates itself automatically without any input from you, the user. It may not be quite the best AV program around so, if you are a high-frequency user of sites like The Pirate Bay, you may need to get a more effective and more expensive anti-virus program. For a list of anti-virus programs, and how they fared in testing, go to one of the websites at the end of this article.

Norton

My client had been using Norton for at least a year because her subscription had expired four days before I arrived. I pointed this out to her, and she stated that she had not known what to do. I explained her options:

- Continue with Norton. This meant paying to continue with protection.
- Install a free anti-virus program.
- Do not use an anti-virus program.

This last option is the one which many people have taken, and which I will never recommend to a client because it is just too dangerous. She chose to continue using Norton.

This meant that we had to purchase an upgrade to the product then download and install the new version. She had received an email with the new installation key but, as luck would have it, this key did not work. There was only one option at this stage: ring tech support. We were lucky because we reached a tech support person who knew what he was doing.

After much discussion, and many false starts, we finally had an installed program. Because this process had taken so much time our tech increased the period of my client's subscription by 30 days to give her 395 days of cover.

One thing that I noticed is that Norton does not have an option to cover only one computer: you can have cover for three users, five users or ten users. \$99 for three users for one year is, in my eyes, too much if you only need cover for one computer.

AVG

My next client apparently with anti-virus problems was using AVG on four computers. Two of these computers had an option under the help menu to update from AVG 2011 to AVG 2012 but the other two did not have this option. One of the two without the option to update was not connected to the internet so I did not worry about it, the other was slated for "next". The two that I updated automatically just worked. That is, until we tried to download emails on one using Microsoft Outlook. This was when the problems started!

We assumed that the problem was with AVG so we rang the AVG help line and, again, got an excellent tech support person. One of the things that he suggested was to try using Windows' *Help and Support*. To get this you click on *Start* then click on *Help and Support*. This did nothing! The next step was to start the program manually: this displayed an error message stating that the program could not be found! Oops!

We tried various things, all to no avail. This was the nearest thing to stalemate until my client suggested that we try a repair install of Microsoft Office to "refresh" Microsoft Outlook. This appeared to work so we tried to download his emails. Lo and behold, this worked! This made me feel like a fool for not thinking of this solution but as, the problem was solved and AVG was updated, all was well.

There is still the nagging problem of why Windows' Help Centre does not work. Perhaps this problem will not recur, or perhaps it will not matter. Perhaps, instead, there is a major problem with Windows which will rear its ugly head later in the proceedings. Time will tell.

Which Anti-Virus?

I have mentioned a number of anti-virus programs in this article. The question remains: which is the best anti-virus program. In my opinion there is no best program, just as there is no best anything. This is why we have choice in so many things. There are a number of things to consider when choosing an AV program, and one which is often forgotten is the extent to which you are prepared to ensure that it is up to date at all times.

I cannot suggest the perfect AV program for you so I suggest that you check the two sites below to see if there is an AV program which you really like. My favourite free AV program at the moment is Microsoft Security Essentials. If you choose to use this program please ensure that you use the correct version for your version of Windows.

Further Information

AV Comparatives	www.av-comparatives.org
AV Test	www.av-test.org
Microsoft Security Essentials	www.microsoft.com/mse