

Radio Days – 2013-03-02

Tip of the Week – AFP Virus

During the week I received some new information about a current virus. This virus is known by a number of names. In Australia it is usually known as the AFP (Australian Federal Police) virus, in the US it is usually known as the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) virus and at least one French version has surfaced in Maryborough.

This virus, which locks your computer and asks for money to unlock it, is bad and it seems able to get through a lot of anti-virus programs. This could be because it infects well-known web pages and is loaded in a *drive-by* attack. This sort of attack involves a web page which has been compromised and then, when you visit that page, your computer gets infected if you just click your mouse anywhere on the page.

A recent variant of this AFP virus uses your computer's webcam to take your photo then place it neatly in the correct position of the virus' screen so that it looks even more threatening. This may well be enough to convince you to pay up before you are taken to court.

Paying money is unlikely to get you any relief: the only way to get relief from this infection is to take your computer to a competent virus removal person. Unfortunately, not everybody who claims to be able to remove viruses can do so without removing everything else on your computer at the same time.

It is blindingly easy to remove a virus: just reinstall Windows with a complete format of your hard disc at the beginning of the reinstall. Unfortunately, while this process does remove the virus, it also removes everything else on your computer. when I say *everything else on your computer* I mean that you will have lost all your programs and all your data in the process! You will never get your data back if you are like most people and do not have a current and complete backup of all your data.

You will also need all the installation CDs and the installation serial numbers for each of your programs (or your downloaded programs and their installation serial numbers). If you do not have all these discs and serial numbers then your computer will not work nearly as well after the virus infection as it did before.

I am assuming that this is not what you want!

Which Anti-Virus Program?

I am often asked which is the best anti-virus program. This is one of those unanswerable questions like *Which is the best mobile telephone network*. I have been doing some research at the two most respected websites which test anti-virus programs to see how they fare. There are a number of interesting results from my research:

- For each anti-virus program the results, and its place on the league table, varies from test to test.
- Some of the lesser-known programs are better than the big-name brands.
- Some of the programs which were excellent in years gone by are now far down the league table.
- Some of the lesser-known programs blitz some of the best-known brands.

I was aware that anti-virus programs did not have consistent performance over time, but I was unaware just how much the performance of various programs varied. I suggest that, if you are interested in how well your anti-virus program works, that you check out its results on the AV-Test website. This will give you some idea of just how well, or how badly, your anti-virus program works over a period of time.

Criteria for Selection

There are a number of reasons for selecting a particular anti-virus program. Here are some of those which I use when selecting an anti-virus (AV) program for a client:

- How happy are they to pay for an anti-virus program?
- Do they see that an AV program is essential?
- Are they prepared to do the needed updating each day or each year?
- Do they have the skills to download and install the new version of the program?
- Do they read the screen to know when a new version of the program is available?
- Are they prepared to pay for an AV program using a credit card over the internet?
- Will they realise the importance of doing these tasks?

Because my clients have such a wide range of skills, I have to take all these factors into account when recommending an anti-virus program for each client.

How do you rate yourself against these criteria?

Have I left out a criterion which you consider important?

Are you prepared to go to any real effort to select your own AV product?

Are you prepared to be responsible for protecting your computer while it is on the internet?

Updating Your AV Program

One area where far too many people fall down is the annual task of installing the latest version of their AV program. I have met too many people who fall into one (or more) of these categories:

- I did not know that it needed to be updated.
- I did not know how to update my AV program
- I do not have the money to update my program
- I do not use my credit card over the internet
- Why is an AV program needed, anyway?

It has been said that there is more than one way to skin a cat. This is valid when considering the number of AV programs which are available for your use. I recommend that you use only one AV program: this is because there are features about the way that they work which means that using more than one AV program will slow your computer drastically.

Summary

In my experience of the people who ring me for help, the most important reason for choosing an AV program is that it does not need to sort of care and attention which you need to lavish on your spouse or your pet. For this reason I often recommend Microsoft Security Essentials: it may not be the most effective AV program but it is the one which needs the least amount of time spent on its watering and feeding.

There are better AV programs out there in the wild but, for many people, there are barriers to their use: barriers like cost and time.

Further Information

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