

Radio Days – 2013-04-20

Tip of the Week – Data Mining

This week there was an interesting segment on *The Checkout*: the ABC's new program about how business is using the data which it collects from you using so-called loyalty cards. The business gets you to give it all the data that it can collect about what you buy and when you buy it and, in return, it tells you that you will get all sorts of rewards.

Some rewards are in the form of flights, some for money on a credit card but invariably the business gets far more from you than you get from it.

One of the examples that was given on the show was about a young girl who was sent a letter by the store asking if she would like to buy some things which were relevant for a pregnant woman. Because she was so young and still living at home her father went ballistic. He demanded that the store make amends to his daughter. The store said that, according to its statistical analysis of her purchases, she was pregnant. Time showed that the store was right.

This is what a company's data can tell it about you.

You leave these same footprints across the internet when you travel from website to website. For the most part this is quite innocuous but, on occasion, you will find that advertisements are becoming more and more targeted to your tastes.

It is for this reason that I turn off a setting in my browsers. The setting is one which allows cookies from third parties (these are called *tracking cookies* because they allow advertising websites to track what advertisements you look at) to reduce the temptation to spend money which I would prefer not to go on junk which will end up in the recycle bin in a week or two.

Please think about the information which you give away, often for nothing, to companies which will use it to make you poorer and themselves richer.

Free Clean-up Programs

Every day there seems to be a new program which will offer to clean your computer of many different types of junk which are not needed. Often these programs are ones which you have downloaded without thinking and installed because there was a button which said *Click here*. When you see this sort of suggestion (or even command) I would like it, if you could for just one moment, engage the suspicion button in your mind. There are all sorts of problems which you can cause for yourself if you click on the wrong button.

AVG

This was brought to my attention during the week by a client who was downloading a program as we were speaking on the phone. His computer was doing some unexpected things so I asked him to run a complete scan using his anti-virus program. He was using AVG Free and, from the front page, started a complete scan to see if there were any viruses still present. There were none.

He opened AVG to do one last check. There he saw a button called *PC Analyser*. He clicked on this to start a check of the computer for problems. He ran its four checks:

- Registry errors
- Junk files
- Fragmentation
- Broken shortcuts.

This showed that there were errors which needed fixing. He downloaded the free one-time fix program and ran the scan then completed the recommended fixes. After running these fixes he discovered that his computer was unstable. This meant that it would freeze at odd moments and that a number of things just seemed not to work.

Malwarebytes

After all this, because I was worried that there were still some problems with his computer, I asked him to download Malwarebytes to perform another check for any malware. There are two versions of Malwarebytes: the free version is what I wanted and it too did not discover any problems with his computer. This seems to suggest that his computer is completely free of any viruses or other sorts of malware. This is an excellent state for a computer!

The only way that I know how to fix these errors is to take the computer to a repair shop where the people who work there know how to fix errors in Windows. Fixing this sort of error is a skill which I do not possess, so outsourcing the problem is the only effective way to get a computer working.

Other Anti-Virus Programs

AVG is an anti-virus program. It is a useful one, but I prefer Microsoft Security Essentials. There are a number of reasons for this:

- It does not need updating every year
- It is free
- It seems to have an excellent detection rate
- It seems to have a very low false positive rate

There are two websites which do independent reviews of anti-virus programs:

- AV Test
- AV Comparatives

Both of these sites show many anti-virus programs and their rankings. The rankings change with each test, so it is impossible to state that there is one best anti-virus program. The only statement that I can make is that MSE is an excellent program for people who are not very interested in the internals of their computer. It is also the program that I have now been using for more several years.

Cleaning Your Computer

When a client's computer has problems I often suggest that he or she runs a clean-up program. The problem with so many of the available clean-up programs is that they are either too lax or too deadly in their cleaning. The clean-up programs which are too lax just do not really do anything except provide you with a warm fuzzy feeling. The clean-up programs which are too deadly do far too much and usually make your computer unusable because they have done so much.

Both of these options are dangerous and I advise you not to use them.

If important files are removed then you may not be able to use your computer after turning it off then back on. I remember one client who rang me after she had removed some fonts which looked wrong. Her computer worked for the rest of the day so she turned it off and went to bed. The next day her computer would not start. It was then that she rang me. I was able to determine that she had removed all the fonts which Windows relies on for its internal workings: if you have removed these fonts then you cannot run Windows: it's as simple as that! When you have caused this sort of problem through your actions it is easier to accept than if the problems are caused by a program which you believed would make your computer faster.

The only solution was to replace these missing fonts by doing a repair install of Windows.

There are a few programs which actually perform an effective clean-up of your computer and achieve what you want without damaging any of your important files or settings. There is a

smaller number of programs which will clean your computer without doing any damage. The only one which I can recommend is CCleaner.

CCleaner

CCleaner is the only cleaning program which I recommend wholeheartedly. This is because it will clean your computer effectively without removing files which are needed for Windows and your programs to work, if you set it up correctly!

There are a number of tabs down the left-hand side of the main screen in CCleaner. My recommended CCleaner settings are:

- Internet Explorer
 - Temporary Internet Files
- Windows Explorer
 - None
- System
 - Temporary Files
 - Clipboard
 - Memory Dumps
 - Chkdsk File Fragments
 - Windows Log Files
- Advanced
 - Old Prefetch Data

CCleaner is the most effective cleaning program that I know. I have been using it on my computers without any problems for more years than I can remember. During this time I have also been recommending it to all my clients. Unfortunately, not everybody is using it: I still see people who have used another cleaning program and ended up with an unusable computer.

There are many other programs which purport to do this job effectively but I have seen too many instances where people have cleaned their computer to the stage where it will no longer start. This usually means one or more of these problems:

- A file needed to run Windows has been removed.
- A file needed to run Windows has been replaced with one which does not work.
- Windows' Registry has been corrupted.
- Windows' Registry has had an essential entry removed.
- Windows' Registry has had a new entry created which is invalid.

Please check before you start using a clean-up program: it may not do just what you want!

Further Information

ABC iView	www.abc.net.au/iview/
AVG Free	www.avgfree.com.au
AVG Full	www.avg.com.au
Malwarebytes	www.malwarebytes.org
Microsoft Security Essentials	www.microsoft.com/mse
AV Test	www.av-test.org
AV Comparatives	www.av-comparatives.org
CCleaner	www.piriform.com