

Radio Days – 2014-01-18

Tip of the Week – One Is Enough!

During the week I had a call from a client whose computer was being so slow that it took many minutes to start any program. I watched while he started Firefox then we both waited while the computer thought about showing the first screen of one of my favourite browsers. I asked my client if he had made any changes to his computer recently. He told me that he had installed one of the free anti-virus programs list on my website and things had seemed to go wrong after that.

I explained that using more than one anti-virus program at a time was a recipe for disaster. I reminded him of another client who had installed three anti-virus programs and found the same problem: a very slow computer. I then explained that the reason for this slowness was that each anti-virus program wanted to be the first program to check each other program as it started. This checking is designed to ensure that no viruses run on your computer and it is a necessary evil in this day when there is so much money to be made from writing viruses.

This is fine when you only have one program which wants to be first. The problems start when two or more programs want to be the first to check all other programs as they start. What happens then is the same as when two people try to get through a small space at the same time: they cause a blockage and nothing can move.

I reminded him about my earlier client and how I had told him that have two or more anti-virus programs installed at the same time was like being in bed with both your wife and your mistresses. When he had informed me that he did not have a mistress I asked him to tell someone who cared!

Why Had He Done This?

I asked my client why he had installed a second anti-virus program and he stated that he had a number of viruses and he thought that adding another anti-virus program would ensure that all viruses would be removed.

This meant that we had to remove one of his anti-virus programs then remove all his viruses. The first was easy: Windows had a means of uninstalling a program so we used that. The second objective was more difficult.

I updated his anti-virus program's database (which had not been updated for some time and may have been the cause of the original problem) then ran a full scan. While this was running I downloaded and installed another of my favourite programs: Malwarebytes. This program complements an anti-virus program and also looks for, and removes, unwanted malware.

These two programs took a while to run but soon displayed messages stating that they had found and removed many problem files. So, yes, his computer had become badly infected with all sorts of malware. I asked him what sort of risky behaviour he had been indulging in and he could not tell me.

I suspect that he still had some problems with his computer but they are beyond my skills to remove. My only suggestion is that, if these sorts of problems reappear, he take his computer to a repair shop which has the skills to remove viruses and other malware.

Installing a New Computer

A new client had installed her new computer but the screen did not work. This was when she started to panic. I went to her home and she showed me her computer and, sure enough, the screen was blank. I checked all the connections and discovered that she had two cables running from her tower to her screen.

This was confusing the whole matter so I switched her computer and screen off then removed the cable which was from an earlier generation of screens, leaving the later generation cable connected. This time her screen worked beautifully.

Now we were able to complete the installation of Windows by using her settings for things like the user name. Then it was a matter of connecting her internet, updating her anti-virus program and installing all the other programs which she needed for her daily work. This meant that her copy of Microsoft Office had to be installed and her emails setup in Outlook. Because she is a photographer her photography programs had to be installed and tested.

All this worked well.

Recovering Backup Data

It was then that we discovered that her backup disc had been overwritten by the recovery data which this computer manufacturer had installed as a part of Windows. This seemed to have worked by checking that there was an external storage device attached to her computer so, without asking for permission, the computer decided that this device should be wiped clean and have recovery data written to the device.

Because her old computer had been damaged beyond repair we could not use it to recover her old data so had to do the best we could with what we had.

This is a problem which I had met some years ago so I decided to repeat the actions which I had taken back then because they had been so successful. I downloaded and installed a program called *Recuva* which does its best to find and extract computer files which have been deleted by one or more actions. The process of creating a recovery disc had formatted her external hard disc so it was not possible to just copy the files from her external disc: we had to use some form of recovery program.

Recuva had worked in the past so I tried it again. A normal scan produced no results so I ran a deep scan. This was obviously going to take a long time so we boiled the billy and made a cup of tea. After *Recuva* had worked its magic we had lots of files which could be moved to permanent homes.

It is essential that you copy the recovered files to another drive so that you do not over-write the original recovered file (or any other file) by recovering them to their original location on the affected drive. If you are recovering files deleted from the only drive on your computer you **MUST** recover the files to another drive. This could be a USB stick or an external hard disc.

Recovering these found files was easy: all the files found by *Recuva* were written to one of the four standard libraries (which are stored on the computer's hard disc, not the external disc) which Windows provides. These standard libraries are:

- Documents
- Music
- Pictures
- Videos

It was an easy matter to copy all the recovered files to the appropriate library so that they could be saved permanently. Yes, some files had been lost but a less-experienced person would have lost the lot.

Lessons Learnt

1. Do not install an external hard disc or USB stick to a new computer until it is needed.
2. Always have at least two backups in case one gets over-written.
3. Do not jump the gun.

Further Information

Avast	www.avast.com
AVG	www.avgfree.com.au
Avira	www.avira.com
Bitdefender	www.bitdefender.com.au
Comodo	www.antiviris.comodo.com
MSE	www.microsoft.com/mse
Malwarebytes	www.malwarebytes.org
Spybot	www.safer-networking.org
SUPERAntiSpyware	www.superantispyware.com
Recuva	www.piriform.com