

December
2017

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Cybersecurity Essentials: VPN

Whether it's because of government surveillance or cyberattacks, internet users are more concerned than ever about the privacy of their online activities. Unfortunately, security measures like firewalls and antivirus software can't help you in this case, but there's one that can: Virtual Private Network (VPN).

What is VPN?

Simply put, a VPN is a group of servers you connect to via the internet. Once you've established a connection, your computer acts as if it's on the same local connection as the VPN, making it seem like you moved to a different location.

When you surf the web through a VPN, all the data transmitted and received is also encrypted, preventing anyone --

from hackers to government agencies -
- from monitoring your online activities.

Why should you have one?

Of course, security and privacy are major reasons why you would want a VPN. For example, if you're connected to a public WiFi network -- like the ones you typically see in local cafes and airports -- using a VPN encrypts the information you're sending or accessing online. This means things like credit card details, login credentials, private conversations, or other sensitive documents can't be intercepted by a third party.

VPNs are also useful for accessing geo-restricted websites. If you're traveling abroad and certain US websites are blocked in that region, you can simply connect to a VPN located in the US to access the sites you need.

Which VPN should you choose?

Given the increasing demand for secure online privacy, VPNs are surging in popularity. The following considerations can help you find the right one.

1. Cost

While free VPNs are available, we strongly suggest you avoid them. These keep logs of your internet activity, and in some cases sell them to the highest bidder. Maintaining a VPN service is also expensive, which means the free ones will likely plaster ads on your browser to make a quick buck.

Paid VPNs like SurfEasy and StrongVPN often come with more robust features and configurations that keep you secure. What's more, they don't keep a record of the sites you visit and hound you with pop-ups that lead to dangerous websites.

2. Location

The physical location of VPN servers is important if you want to access region-blocked websites. So if you're planning on accessing a UK-based service, your VPN provider must at least have servers installed in London.

3. Capacity

Read through a VPN provider's terms of service to determine how much data you're allowed to use. If possible, find out how many servers a VPN provider has. If they have plenty of servers online, you can rest assured that they have the capacity to support your internet browsing.

4. Device compatibility

Another important factor to consider is whether the VPN can be used across multiple devices. Nowadays, employees work on laptops, tablets, and smartphones, so you'll want a VPN that's compatible with all these.

5. IP leaking

Finally, a great way to evaluate a VPN service is to sign up for their free trial service and visit <https://ipleak.net/>, which will allow you to check whether your real IP address is actually being leaked. If it manages to track your physical location, you need to opt for a more reliable VPN service.

VPNs are now a vital component of cybersecurity, and if you need help selecting the right one for your business, consult with our security experts today. We also offer comprehensive cybersecurity services so no hacker or third party can get their hands on your data.



Microsoft's new productivity apps are live!

In July 2017, Microsoft announced three brand new apps for Office 365: Connections, Listings, and Invoicing. They were designed for businesses with fewer than 300 employees and after a few months of beta testing, they're finally available to Business Premium users. Take a minute to learn about what they can do for your team!

Microsoft Invoicing

Word and Excel have hundreds of templates for generating company invoices, but this new app does much more than just create documents. Invoicing allows you to store the names, descriptions, and prices of your products and services in a connected database. You can also store your tax information, company logo, and a click-to-pay PayPal badge, which means half of the necessary information is automatically filled out the moment you click *Create*.

In addition to clean and professional looking documents, Invoicing also makes it easy to organize, store, and search past invoices thanks to a built-in QuickBooks integration. Last but not least, all of this is easily accessible from Microsoft's mobile app.

Microsoft Listings

With its centralized dashboard, Listings allows you to manage and update company details displayed by Google, Facebook, Bing, and Yelp. It also helps you monitor your company's online reputation by tracking page-views, company reviews, and Likes.

Microsoft Connections

Connections is the perfect app for small business email marketing. Similar to the Invoicing platform, Connections stores your company information and uses it to create personalized email marketing campaigns with the click of a button.

For example, templates for newsletters, referrals, and promotions include customizable discounts and offers that trigger pre-written follow-up campaigns. Connections tracks and analyzes the performance of all your email-based campaigns to make refining and improving your content a breeze, whether it's from your desktop or the mobile app.

How to enable Invoicing, Listings, and Connections

As long as you have an Office 365 Business Premium subscription, accessing these apps requires only a global admin login. From the Admin Center, click the *Settings* tab on the left-hand side of the screen, followed by *Services & add-ins* and then *Business apps*. In this menu, you can grant specific users permission to use Microsoft's newest programs.

Setting up these apps is fairly easy. However, it's even easier to have your Office 365 account managed by us. We could have remotely installed Invoicing, Listings, and Connections for you almost a month ago, and with our information security expertise and unlimited IT support requests, there's no limit to the value we can add to your Office 365 subscription. Give us a call to get started!





Here come crapware-free PCs

Bloatware, trialware, crapware -- the unnecessary software usually pre-installed by the manufacturer on your brand new PC. Besides being annoying, this type of software also slows down your machine and can tamper with security. Microsoft is fed up with it too, which is why they've come up with Windows 10 Signature Edition PCs. Read on to find out more.

What are Windows 10 Signature Edition PCs?

Microsoft Windows 10 Signature Edition is a new generation of specially configured PCs that are clear of junkware, which is unnecessary software pre-installed by PC manufacturers on new PCs. Microsoft is aiming to provide users with cleaner, more optimized PCs.

What's tempting about them?

They are cleaner. It's undeniable that PCs devoid of aggressive attempts to lure you to pay for upgrades is a more pleasant user experience. No more annoyances, no more need to spend time manually uninstalling unnecessary programs yourself.

They are faster. Once PCs are clear of third-party junkware, they'll load quicker, whether you need to boot, shut-down, sleep, or resume working.

They are more secure, according to Microsoft. The Signature Edition PCs boast a built-in firewall and anti-virus and anti-phishing tools that come with ongoing security support and updates throughout their useful lives. What's more, ridding your PC of bloatware means reducing the chances of you clicking on suspicious ads that will make your PC prone to attack.

You can find Signature Edition PCs in Microsoft's brick-and-mortar stores and online, manufactured by leading PC makers such as Dell, Acer, HP, and Lenovo.

Is there any downside?

Possibly, yes. Signature Edition PCs usually cost more than similar machines containing bloatware. This is because bloatware is a source of extra income, and many vendors end up increasing the PC price to make up for the loss.

Another thing to note is that even though the Signature Edition PCs have less third-party software, much of Microsoft's own crapware remains. That includes Candy Crush Soda Saga, Bubble Witch 3 Saga, and Drawboard PDF. The good news is Microsoft bloatware generally doesn't affect a PC's performance unless it is running.

Interested in switching to a cleaner version of Windows, but unsure whether it would be worth it? Before spending your hard-earned money on a piece of hardware, you need to make sure you understand the pros and cons, so why not consult our experts today? They know about computers and can advise you on how to make the right IT investments.

The team at E-Safe would like to thank you for reading and have a Happy Holiday!