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Protecting Against Computer Viruses and Malware – Learning to Use Your 6th Sense

By Rich Kenney, Vice President, TechSolutions

It is once again time to revisit the awful topic of computer viruses and malware. We have touched on the topic several times since we started putting out our monthly newsletter. I think it is a topic that should be talked about often since the technicians here at TSI run across a minimum of one infected computer per day, usually more.

Most people have anti-virus software installed and 90% of the time, that software is up-to-date and functional. What I think most people lack in terms of protecting themselves against malware is a sense of "this could be trouble if I click on it". This article intends to shed some light on the subject of what YOU can do to protect yourself against computer viruses.

When we're notified that a computer has been infected, some of the things we typically hear from infected users are along the line of:

- "But wait, I thought my computer had anti-virus software installed. That software must not be doing a good job."
- "All I was doing was reading the news from CNN's website. I didn't do anything wrong."
- "I wasn't even on the internet. I just saw a message come up that said *Click Here To Continue* and then my computer started acting screwy so I called you guys."
- "Someone must have been on my computer. I had off work yesterday and when I came in today, I had all of these weird messages."

Usually, words coming from these people can generally be categorized as a total dismissal of any blame or wrongdoing. It is rare for us to hear someone admit that he/she was on the internet on a suspicious website when the virus entered the computer. I would like to offer an alternate explanation as to how the computer was compromised: lack of a 6th sense.

Most viruses and malware can be avoided by following these guidelines (the guideline about the 6th sense is always the one where people have trouble):

Proper anti-virus protection – Although it is absolutely essential to have good anti-virus software installed and current, many times AV software will not protect you from malware when you the user (either knowingly or unknowingly) give the software permission to run itself.

Stay current with Microsoft updates – Security vulnerabilities and software bugs are consistently being corrected with all Microsoft software from Windows Operating Systems to Office 2010 to Exchange

Server and SQL Server. Applying these updates regularly by running Windows Update is an important component to protecting yourself against viruses.

Stay current with 3rd party updates – The same Microsoft logic applies to all of the other software installed on your computer. Examples of 3rd party software that needs regular updating include Java, Adobe Acrobat, Adobe Flash, Firefox and Chrome. One thing to keep in mind when updating some of that software is to always read before clicking NEXT. In some cases, checkboxes left checked denotes your acceptance of installing yet another piece of 3rd party software or perhaps an added toolbar in Internet Explorer. For example, when installing the current version of Java, if you were to accept all of the defaults (by clicking Next, Next, Next, Next, Finish without making any changes), you would have installed the Ask.com toolbar and set Ask.com as your default search engine in Internet Explorer.

Use your 6th Sense – This is the NUMBER 1 DEFENSE against viruses. Be smart. Learn to spot and identify suspicious elements of email and web pages. Many emails contain hyperlinks and/or attachments that are either links to viruses or viruses themselves. Once you click the hyperlink to go the linked website, you have, in effect, provided permission for the virus to propagate to your computer. Red flags and tricks to keep in mind include (but are certainly not limited to) the following:

- Hover mouse over the link to see where it will actually take you before clicking the link. When your cursor touches (not clicks on) the link you'll see the destination displayed either in a box that pops up next to your cursor or along the bottom of the screen
- Be wary of links ending in .PHP
- Be wary of links to foreign country domains
- Watch for domain names that are slightly different than what it is "supposed" to be. (such as micorsoft.com, or bankofarnerica.com)
- Don't always trust email from known senders
- Be wary of email attachments that could possibly execute some code such as attachments ending in .EXE, .PHP, .HTM, .HTML, .XLS, .DOC, .CMD, .BAT
- Generally speaking, data-only attachments should be safe such as those ending in .TXT, .BMP, .JPG, .GIF, .MP3

For more red flags to watch out for, see this web page. For examples of what suspicious emails might look like, UPS.com has consolidated some very good examples on this web page.

One thing is for sure, computer viruses and malware are out there and they are not going away. By utilizing your 6th Sense you can reduce the likelihood infecting your computer. If you need help remediating or guarding against viruses, simply call us. Let our experienced technicians help you learn the tricks to not getting a computer infection.

Landlines vs. Cellphones: You No Longer Have to Choose

(NewsUSA) - You know we've become a nation that insists on being "connected" at all times when even your grandmother is texting. Phones ... email ... the Internet. We want it all, and we want it now.

But with consumers jittery about spending on anything but the basics, the question naturally arises: Do you really need a landline phone if you also own a cellphone?

Here are four reasons against pulling the plug:

- Better 9-1-1 location tracking. Dispatch centers can find the exact address where landline calls originated. However, with wireless phones, emergency responders can only pinpoint an approximate latitude and longitude of wireless phones -- not exactly comforting if, say, you're having a heart attack in an apartment building. "Even if we nail your [cellphone] location, we don't know what floor you are on," says Steve Marzolf, president of the National Association of State 911 Administrators in a recent MSNBC.com (now NBCNews.com) article.

- Higher reliability. "Frustrating" may be the nicest word to describe the feeling of having an important cellphone call dropped, mid-sentence, due to a poor wireless signal.

- No need to constantly recharge. In what may be the strangest example of the perils of forgetting to recharge a mobile phone, the Washington Post recently reported that police in Silver Spring, Md., tracked down a serial burglar after he left his cell phone plugged in at the scene of his last crime. His own home, it turned out, had lost power in a storm. (See "Higher reliability.")
- Sweetheart deals. The cost of maintaining a landline is actually plummeting in places where cable companies are offering great deals on phone, TV and Internet.

In fact, price may be spurring many to rethink cutting the cord. But thanks to the convergence of landlines and cellphones, consumers don't have to answer the "either-or" question. For example, the new VTech DS6521-2 phone with "Connect to Cell" technology is the answer for anyone who wants the best of both worlds (www.vtechphones.com).

You can make and receive both cell and landline calls on this stylish, two-handset cordless phone system. Its one-button pairing feature makes set-up easy.

For those cell phone users who opted for frugality and are now suffering from "Cord Cutters Remorse Syndrome," you're in luck. You don't even need a landline to use it, and outbound calls can be made using cellular minutes while at home -- even if your cellular phone is charging.

So, if you're someone who is entertaining the idea of going solely mobile, just remember that it may not be time to cut the landline cord just yet.

Top 5 Browser Extensions That Can Improve Your Browsing Experience
By Fidd Wann

There are ordinary browsers, and there are very good browsers. One of the things that distinguishes one browser from another is its features. There have been many good browsers in recent years but ultimately, Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox stand out.

These two browsers have amazing features. We are going to explore one such feature in this article, which is the installation of extensions that easily integrate with these and some other browsers and give you a pleasant browsing experience. I am going to list five extensions that will help improve your browsing experience, be it on Google's Chrome, Mozilla's Firefox or another browser, and explain why you need to get these extensions integrated into your browser.

First on the list is an extension called FireShot, which is really awesome. With this extension, you can capture an entire webpage you open or certain portions of the page that you might deem relevant to you. You can eventually save the captured page as an image onto your computer, either in a picture format or PDF format. If the captured page holds important information, you can copy it onto your phone or tablet after saving it, which is very easy as compared to saving an entire web page with its accompanied folders, that cannot be copied onto a phone or tablet.

The second on this list is the Turn Off the Lights extension. If you are someone who loves to watch videos online, then this extension is for you. On some video sites, while you are watching the main video, there are lots of video thumbnails in the background which can be distractive. With Turn Off the Lights, you can dim the entire browser screen background, without dimming the area showing the video you are playing, allowing you to have a clearer view of the video being played and also be less distracted. This extension is also very effective on video sites that have a white background.

The third on the list is Adblock Plus. AdBlock Plus is an extension that comes in to block all those unnecessary pop ups that you cannot control. Sometimes, all it takes is a click on a web page and you

have other web pages popping up in different windows which could be annoying. AdBlock takes care of this problem. It enables you enjoy your browsing experience without necessarily having to go through the pain of closing pop-up windows. You can also tweak the settings to control certain pages, that is, if it is a site that requires a pop up browser to enable you access extra information.

Number four is a favorite for many who use it. It is the video downloader extension. Almost everyone who gets unto the internet loves to download, be it music or videos. Sometimes, it is very difficult to download free videos and music and this is where video downloader becomes most relevant. All you have to do is open the page with the download content, click on the item you want to download and once it opens, or starts playing, the video downloader button will become active. All you simply do now is to click on the video downloader icon and select the file to download, it's that easy.

Finally, I can't end this article without touching on social media extensions. Yes, most social media platforms also have extensions that have been successfully integrated into these web browsers. The Instagram extension is one of the amazing social media extensions. Some find it difficult to access Instagram and its full features on their web browsers. For those who do not have Bluestacks (Android emulator for pc) to open Instagram on your computer, the Instagram extension is a very good option available for you. It enables you to view your profile, followers, those you are following, comment on posts, and also like posts. You can also view popular photos, invite friends and search for users or tags. The Instagram extension can also be popped out of the browser to stand on its own. Other social media extensions include Facebook and Twitter. These extensions emulate the way these social media sites work in a very simplified way, so you can be browsing while viewing your social media feeds in a drop down box on the side at the same time without necessarily opening new tabs.

With the listed extensions above and other relevant extensions you might find important, I hope your browsing experience will be improved in a significant way.

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The Best Way to Find Deals on the Internet

 (NewsUSA) - Have you ever had the problem of receiving so many "deals" in your email inbox that you don't have time to sift through them all? Well, it turns out there's a better way to find Internet deals you actually want without spending valuable time searching through the ones you don't want.

"When companies push deals to users -- whether they want them or not -- they are wasting their time, and your time," says John Casson, CEO and founder of Daily Deal Superstore -- a deal aggregator that brings together discounts and offers from across the web and compiles emails tailored to your interests. "We designed Daily Deal Superstore so that the user is in control. DDS lets them choose the cities and types of deals they want"

It's this user control that allows customers to target the deals they want across a number of sites.

"If you wanted an Italian restaurant deal in Queens, and you found that LivingSocial didn't have one, you may have missed out because there may have been one on Gilt City," says Casson. DailyDealSuperstore.com takes the stress out of searching through several deal companies. We show all those Italian restaurant deals from all the companies."

From a collective search, including sites like Woot!, KGB Deals, Gilt City and Groupon, you can make your smartphone and Facebook page do the work for you. Daily Deal Superstore is a website that gathers deals from hundreds of deal companies, categorizes them, puts them in 10,000 different towns and cities and sends a customized email with offers relating to your interests and specified location.

Smartphone users can take advantage of this new platform too, and the easy-to-use Facebook app makes it even easier, as deals are curated based upon the user's location, "likes" and interests.

"It will show you deals that relate to exactly where you are and what you like," says Casson. "It's simple and fast, and makes it easier not to miss out on deals."

Better yet, users can earn points every time a friend buys a deal, forever (so long as they are a member). These points are redeemed for reward cards such as Amazon vouchers and iTunes gift cards.