



Computer Security

Using your computer nowadays, particularly on the internet, just somehow doesn't feel as safe as it used to a few years back, why? Well, all we hear about is threats from Email and Internet browsing, be they Spyware, Malware, Adware, Phishing or simply uncontrollable amounts of Spam in you email account! What are these?

Spyware: this refers mainly to software that is designed to allow a third party to monitor or receive information about your computer. The simplest ones just track websites visited etc, with the most dangerous tracking keystrokes to try and find your passwords and online login details.

Malware: this term is today used to describe the threat of viruses, worms and Trojans etc. It is different from Spyware in that it is designed to replicate itself and spread. Malware's principle goal is malicious, in that it is designed to damage or infiltrate a computer for variety of reasons, such as using your computer to send spam email.

Adware: this term refers to software which contains advertising functions – pop up windows while browsing the internet for example – which are often contained in Freeware (free software) in order for the programmer to gain some revenue from his programming. Common sources of Adware are free Internet Explorer tool bars, Smiley toolbars, peer-to-peer software such as Kaza.....

Phishing: cleverly designed email trying to con you into giving sensitive information such as bank login details, usually under the guise of a security alert, such as asking you for you login details to re-enable your account, or something along those lines.

Spam: not really a threat, mainly an abundance of unwanted emails advertising all sorts of products and services, or simply trying to con you into sending a few thousand pounds halfway across the world, so that you can have a 20% share of \$47,500,000.00 (*forty seven million, five hundred thousand United States dollars*) for getting wads of cash out of Africa – eh Mr Howgul Abul Arhu!!

So, what can we do to avoid all these threats? 100% avoidance is not possible, but there is variety of software available that reduces these risks, some more efficient than others, some more expensive, and others so invasive that you probably wished you'd never bought it in the first place! Apologies, just having a rant. PC World recently tested some of these products, and recommended those from Symantec (Norton) and Zonelabs (Zonealarm), closely followed by products from Panda and Trend Micro. I personally don't use any of them, preferring individual simple pieces of software to protect my network from the various threats, rather than 1 that does it all – Why I hear you ask? They can be invasive, inundate you with their own pop up messages, make decisions for you, try and sell you more of their other software, be greedy with system resources..... ring any bells!

To limit these risks, there are a few things you can do:

- avoid opening any emails from people you don't know – delete them
- avoid downloading smiley and explorer free toolbars

- when registering online for anything, ensure you “tick” or “untick” the relevant boxes referring to sending you advertising via email. If you do need to register for something online you are unsure about, create yourself a free email address (such as Hotmail) and use that temporarily
- if pop-up boxes appear while browsing the internet, close them with the red cross in the corner, avoiding clicking within the pop-up itself – your browser will be directed else where...
- do not answer emails asking for login and account details, if you are unsure, phone the bank – might save you the contents of your bank account!

But also:

- use some sort of Anti-Virus, firewall and anti Spyware
- if in doubt, don't open it, don't click it, don't answer it...
- please back up your computer/files so that if one day it all goes horribly wrong, you haven't lost all your work, docs, photos, music, email addresses, the lot...

Edward Marshall

Marshall Consulting
21 Résidence St Martin
Chemin des Faisses
83300 Draguignan
Mobile: 06 26 98 03 12, Tel: 04 94 84 12 90

www.marshallconsulting.fr

© Copyright Edward Marshall 2007