

Safety on the Internet - To Click or not to Click

PART 2 – Anti-Virus Programs

One of the misconceptions I hear from customers is that if they have an anti-virus program on their computer they won't get a virus. This can't be farther from the truth. We get computers in the shop all the time that already have Norton, McAfee, and other purchased (or free) anti-virus (AV) programs that are fully corrupted with Trojan viruses, spyware, and other malware. The viruses had disabled the anti-virus programs from detecting them and had taken over the computer.

One of the ways that anti-virus programs try to protect the computer is that they have a database of known viruses that they scan for. The problem with this method is that the nasty virus companies are coming out with new threats daily, so the anti-virus companies have to play catch-up with their database. This is also why running an out-of-date, purchased version of an AV program does not do you much good. You would be better off with a free, up-to-date, AV program.

Besides using the database system, anti-virus programs try to catch unknown viruses by monitoring the computer system's activity. This helps block viruses coming from outside sources, but sometimes these monitoring systems can actually block the user from doing what he/she wants to do on the computer. The AV program can block certain features in websites that you need to fully make use of the website. I have worked on many computer networks that were having problems connecting to printers or computer hard drives only to find out that the anti-virus firewall was blocking the connection. Once I allowed these devices through the firewall, everything started working.

I no longer use purchased, full version, anti-virus programs. If I am using Windows 7, I use Microsoft Security Essentials which can be downloaded for free from Microsoft. If I am using Windows 8, I use the built in Windows Defender which is already part of Windows 8 and just needs to be turned on (you will need to uninstall your other anti-virus program before you can turn on Windows Defender). The nice thing about these free programs is that they don't try to sell you anything and they run in the background without bothering you. There are other free programs like AVG, Avast, etc., but most try to either up-sell you to their paid-for version or they require you to sign up for an account.

Although there are still many more viruses written for PCs than Macs, I have recently been finding more and more malware on Mac computers where the malware has taken over the user's browser and changed the search engine to give the user results laden with ads instead of what he/she was searching for.

We all have to understand that no anti-virus software can protect us from all the threats on the internet. We, as computer users, have to take full responsibility and get smart about how we interact with the internet to avoid viruses.

In my next article I will go over ways to avoid viruses, malware, and adware.

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