

Article: COMPUTERS BEHAVING BADLY

Topic: Updates

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Does your computer have the latest protection?. Does it have ANY?

The following is a list of programs, freely available from the Internet, which everybody should have on their computers. If you already have any of the following, please make sure you download the latest versions.

Virus protection. The company Grisoft have just released version 7 of their hugely popular anti-virus program called AVG. This version is still for free and has all the features of the expensive retail shop purchased offerings. Grisoft will soon be stopping updates for AVG6 so current users will be forced to download the next version. AVG7 can be found at <http://free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php/doc/2/>.

Adware protection. Lavasoft's latest contribution is Ad-aware Personal SE. The biggest advantage is a faster scanning capability over its predecessor, Ad-aware 6. Download it from <http://www.lavasoftusa.com/support/download> to remove any of those annoying, grey, pop-up boxes that try to get you to click on something, or offer free software or medicine or if you notice extra icons appearing on your computer or miscellaneous programs suddenly starting when you boot up your PC.

Spyware protection. The widely successful Spybot – Search and Destroy is up to version 1.3. If you have 1.2, this is now unsupported and no new updates are available. Download the latest at <http://www.spybot.info/en/download/index.html>. This program locates and removes any malicious infections that are designed to retrieve your personal data, like email addresses, user ID's, passwords etc.

A word of warning. Ad-aware and Spybot are 'reactive' not 'proactive'. They don't stop the infections, only remove them if found. But considering the programs and all future updates are free, they really are hard to pass up. They do a sterling job and have fixed many a malfunctioning computer. Add them to your regular maintenance routine of your computer to ensure a clean operating environment.

Firewall protection. Two of the popular free programs are Kerio Personal Firewall and ZoneAlarm. You can find them respectively at http://www.kerio.com/kpf_home.html and <http://www.zonealarm.com>. This type of protection actively listens to internet communications and prompts the user for intervention when it encounters a new internet access method. They can initially be annoying as they learn your surfing habits during their 'burning in' period. However, your perseverance will be greatly rewarded as you watch "hacker's" attempts to access your computer foiled.

Also, if you have Windows XP, you should have Service Pack 2. It contains all the updates, patches and fixes ever released for XP as well as enhanced security in an attempt to reduce the vulnerabilities that have plagued Windows XP. Be aware, it is a very large download (about 280meg) and will take about 36 hours if you have dial-up access to the Web. The other option is to order the CD from Microsoft at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/sp2/cdorder/en_us/default.msp or buy a monthly PC magazine which should have it bundled on the supplementary CD.

In true 'buyer beware' fashion, these levels of protection are not a guarantee that your computer will not at some stage be infected, they provide an extra safety net and make it that little bit harder for the would-be hacker to do harm to your personal, irreplaceable data.

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