

When a net isn't safe. – The Inter(net) can be a safe net with a little help.

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“Computer Security” Just those two words put together can make you anxious and even nervous. Thoughts of your credit card numbers or other personal information floating around the Internet come to some minds. Some may think about their antivirus or lack of antivirus software. While others point the finger at all that junk mail they get or those pesky pop ups that just won't go away. In reality computer security or the lack of, makes everyone vulnerable.

From the individual with one computer on a dial up connection to the corporate network with hundreds of computers and everyone in between, computer security has become a real issue these days.

A few things you can do to protect yourself: First and foremost, make sure you have a good Antivirus program and you update it on a regular basis. By updating you stay protected from the latest threats. A good antivirus program should protect the files on your computer, your web browsing, and your email.

Speaking of updates, have you ever seen the little update window in the lower right corner of your screen telling you Microsoft wants to install updates? It's a good idea to do as 80% of them are security related.

Avoid opening up mail from people you don't know and almost never open up attachments in an email from people you don't know. Chances are the attachment is a file that will cause problems on your computer. Unsolicited email like this is referred to as SPAM. If you receive an email telling you that you won an all expense vacation to some exotic place or a gift card to Macy's or Target and you don't enter contests then chances are you didn't really win anything but the junk mail you received. The same goes for those pop ups that advertise deals too good to be true. Always use the X in the upper right hand corner instead of clicking within the pop up. Usually by clicking anything in the pop up will take your computer into another popup or more.

With the cost of laptops and other wireless devices becoming more affordable people are enjoying the freedom of going wireless. This usually involves buying a wireless router or access point that hooks into your high speed connection. These devices are so easy to set up. Unfortunately most people don't change the default password that it comes with or secure their wireless connection with a pass key. This leaves the device wide open for anyone within range, such as someone in the neighborhood to be able to surf over your connection and possibly see the contents of your computer(s).

Phishing (Pronounced Fishing) is when you receive an email or a pop up asking you to verify a password, credit card information, or some other sensitive data. The senders of these emails usually pretend to be someone from a bank, credit card company, EBay, or an online pay site such as PayPal and are fishing for your information. Identity theft has become a real problem fooling people into submitting information to these fake sites. Never respond to emails like this. Instead go to the actual website if you have an account with them and check there. Or simply pick up the phone and contact your bank or credit card company and ask them if there is anything you should be made aware of.

Also, file sharing which was big in the late 90's (Think Nabster and others.) has become a big problem with the spread of viruses, trojans (programs that get installed on your computer allowing another computer to gain access to your files.) and Spyware (Similar to trojans but usually less harmful). Kids today are downloading music, programs, and even full movies at an alarming rate with today's faster speeds. What they don't realize is they may also be downloading infected files from an un-trusted source.

Security is something to be seriously considered when it comes to computers and with a little software and a few preventive measures can make you're computing experience a much safer one.

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