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Keep the Bad Guys Out of Your PC
by Michael Nauman

Thieves, legitimate businesses, and hackers all vie to put applications on your PC. The thieves are trying to use your good credit for themselves. The legitimate businesses want to sell your name/postal address/ email address/shopping habits to other companies, the saleable feature being your predisposition towards certain products. Hackers are anti-social jerks who think it is just wonderful to raise internet hell—break into presumably secure data banks; saturate web sites with so many "hits" they can not handle the traffic and shut down; cause as many PCs as possible to no longer work properly; capture PCs and enlist them towards these ends.

And then there are the harmless but irritating purveyors of SPAM—unsolicited emails.

All of these sources of malicious code have one thing in common. They spread their joy via the internet. If a PC never goes on the internet, it might never become infected.

Notice I said, "Might never." Other entry points are CDs, floppy disks, and DVDs.

But the internet offers us so much. You can quickly check on the weather, breaking news, stocks, see what's playing at local theatres; hotel, flight, theatre, DMV, doctor appointments and reservations; get driving directions from your home address to wherever you want to go; check the status of the commercial flight bringing a member of your family home; rent a car; and, of course, shop using your credit card, with your purchase being delivered to your front door in a few days. And then there is language translation, email, instant messaging, internet phone calls, and search engines to quickly help you research any topic that interests you.

So it is a wonderful world for PCs, but a dangerous world for PCs. How can a person safely use the internet and enjoy its many benefits? Does one have to be a computer expert equal to the hackers? Does safety cost a lot?

You see, there are groups of "good guy" computer experts who don't like the bad guys, or any piece of them, and who spend a lot of time and energy figuring out how to defeat them. This is war. It is a dynamic process. The bad guys come up with something new; the good guys find the antidote, and on it goes.

The way you keep the bad guys out of your PC is to follow safe surfing practices:

1. You do not open email attachments even from God until you check them out with your virus program: excellent virus programs are free, because it is in everybody's interest to keep the internet clean, including companies that create these programs.
     Use this procedure to check email attachments—click on the attachments icon, and you see them listed. Don't open them; save them to the desktop. Once there, you right-click on each one in turn and from the drop-down menu, click on having your virus program scan the attachment. If clean, it's probably OK to open the attachments.

2. You do not download any programs from the internet unless you know the source is trustworthy. Do NOT download some wonderful-sounding 'good thing' offered you in a surprise web pop-up, or sitting there on a web site (such as a free IQ test), even if it promises to cure all your children's problems and yours. It won't. But it well might be malicious code! So resist. Do NOT Open.