

Computer Security

In Today's Society, Protecting Your Computer Is A Requirement

Advances in computer technology is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it affords us quick and easy access to numerous conveniences such as bank statements, favorite shopping centers, school and health records, and more. On the other hand, it can also grant the same access to those who aren't supposed to get it. Although it's a rare occurrence, hacking has become the biggest criminal nuisance in computer history.

Make no bones about it. There's nothing innocent or cute about the hacker. Today's hackers aren't the pimply-faced teen rebels that you might be thinking of. Instead, this generation of hackers are grown individuals who are more than likely earning a living by stealing the identities of innocent, law abiding individuals and then selling those identities to others who want to slip by the system. And the only protection against these seedy people is prevention.

Computer security couldn't be more important than it is today and that's why we've taken the time to introduce it to you. You can reduce the probability of experiencing identity theft by making your computer as hacker-proof as possible. All that's needed is a little software and a lot of common sense.

1. Install an anti-virus/anti-spyware program. Anti-virus/anti-spyware software will stop malicious code from downloading and installing onto your computer while you peruse the Internet. Known as viruses, worms, or spyware, this malicious code can destroy important files and render your computer good for only one thing: sending sensitive data back to the server of an identity thief.
2. Don't store sensitive data on your computer in the first place. Should your computer get infected with a virus, worm, or piece of spyware, you can thwart the individuals responsible by not storing your personal information on your PC so that when and if your computer does send back data - it won't be anything valuable. Hackers look for things like full names, social security numbers, phone numbers, home addresses, work-related information, and credit card numbers. If these things aren't saved onto a computer, there's nothing critical to worry about other than restoring your computer to a non-virus condition.
3. Don't open files without scanning them with an anti-virus/anti-spyware program. In the past, the warning was to avoid opening files from people that you don't know. Today it's really not safe to open files from anyone (without scanning the files) because that's how viruses get spread - through files - even by mistake. So even though your co-worker may have emailed a funny video, it's no more safe to open than a video downloaded from a complete stranger. Be safe

and scan each and every file you download from the Internet or receive through email regardless of where it came from.

4. Create a barrier between your computer and prying eyes. Anti-virus/anti-spyware programs are only effective after the effect. But you can prevent identity theft from occurring by installing a firewall. A firewall is software that checks all data entering and exiting a computer and it then blocks that which doesn't meet specified security criteria (user-defined rules).¹

5. Don't click on website links in spam messages. In an effort to obtain personal information, some spammers will send email that asks you to click on a link. The email messages are often disguised as important messages from well-known online establishments, and they often try to scare their readers into clicking links with threats of closing an account of some sort. Sometimes the links are harmless and attempt to con the reader into volunteering personal information (credit card number), but other times the links attempt to download harmful software onto a computer.

Your best protection against computer crimes is your own knowledge. Hopefully the suggestions above will prompt you into taking appropriate action and into protecting your computer with the suggested tools. In doing so, you'll not only protect yourself, you'll prevent the spread of these malicious activities and protect others at the same time.

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