

Are you proactive or reactive?

We all try our best to prevent problems before they start. In our homes we install smoke detectors and place fire extinguishers in the kitchen to prevent our house from burning down.

We keep our trees thinned and trimmed so high winds do not

tear them up or knock them down onto our homes. We brush our teeth to prevent tooth decay and cavities.

Responsible gun owners lock the majority of their guns in gun safes to prevent their firearms from being stolen by thieves.

An ounce of prevention is definitely worth more than a pound of cure. This carries just a much weight in the computer world to keep our data and computing infrastructures safe and intact. Today we are going to review some simple but critical steps you can take to secure your digital environment.

Back in the 1990s, our company's main goal was to take clients from a reactive state of mind to a proactive business process model. This meant finding all of their vulnerabilities with anything computer related



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and offering them solutions to minimize their risk.

First and foremost, back up your data! I say this all the time but I cannot stress it enough. Just last week we ran through how to save your data to external hard drives under Microsoft Vista.

Since external hard drives are getting so cheap with 500 GB ones going for around \$100 now, buy a second one, swap them out and keep one in a remote location in case of fire or theft.

The computer world ends without electricity. Just ask the people in Houston about that this past month.

Numerous small companies and families to our southeast realized they could not do numerous everyday tasks like financial management, homework and online insurance filings because their computer and/or Internet connection was down due to not having power.

Last year I put in a propane-powered 25-KVA generator that runs our whole house and worked like a champ for the seven hours we were down during like a couple of weeks ago.

Houstonians are buying smaller generators by the thousands now that they have gotten a strong taste of not having power.

I recommend every homeowner purchase, install and test at least an 8-KVA gasoline generator to run a refrigerator, water well and a small air conditioner to create one "cool room" for comfortable sleeping quarters. It can also run your television, a computer, and the DSL/Cable/Wireless modem equipment to provide Internet connectivity.

On a smaller scale all personal computers should be plugged into a battery backup UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply). This covers small power outages lasting from seconds to twenty minutes by keeping your computer running on battery while Bluebonnet Electric gets the power back up.

These small \$50 UPS units can really come in handy by preventing hard and abrupt shutdowns due to line power loss. These cutoffs tend to corrupt hard drives and are not good for power supplies and other sensitive computer components.

The Internet is still the wild west with the good, the bad and the ugly all available at blazing speeds with no filtering. As res-

sponsible parents and business owners we need to filter out the garage that has a negative effect on our children and employees.

OpenDNS.com offers a free content filtering service simply by using their DNS (Domain Name Service) addressing service. This was also written about and explained in detail on my Web site.

I am probably one of the highest paid dust blowers in the Washington County. Numerous times I have fixed and saved a computer from melting down just by taking off the cover and blowing out huge accumulations of dirt, dust, hair, carpet fibers, dead bugs, spider webs and even mice!

Any significant debris in a computer clogging air vents, cooling grills or exhaust fans will raise the operating temperature of the unit and slowly cook the CPU, motherboard and power supply. Every change of season you should pop off that cover and blow out the dirt and dust with a can of compressed air.

Too much of my time is spent fighting negative forces that threaten and compromise the integrity of computers. I am talking of course about viruses, spyware, malware and other bad bugs that infect the software of personal computers.

To be proactive and prevent these gremlins from taking over your computer, implementation of a good antivirus and antispyware utility is absolutely critical. The best protective software in my book is still AVG Antivirus/Antispyware from GriSoft.com.

There is still the free version for home users at free.GriSoft.com and the commercial version of it for companies can be pur-

chased at www.GriSoft.com for a reasonable price.

The latest version 8 of AVG protects computers from both viruses and spyware while using fewer system resources to perform those activities. If you currently have version 7 I recommend you uninstall it, download the latest version 8, and install it.

The time to do this is BEFORE you have problems and preferably it should be done right after you take the new computer out of its box. Antivirus/antispyware is one of the most important proactive steps you can take to prevent system slowdowns and instabilities before they start.

Finally, software needs maintenance too. Though it does not wear and tear like hardware does, there are important updates that need to be made to Microsoft Windows and Office.

For the most part Windows updates are automatic but you will have to occasionally reboot or accept major service pack updates.

Bottom line: We have homeowners' insurance to be proactive against threats to our homes so let's show that same preventive thought process by implementing common sense proactive measures for our computing world.

Next week's column: Hard drive health.

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