

Protecting your computer from viruses



John Deans

It did not take long reviewing my third quarter financials to see that one of my income streams was rising too fast over the past few months. This spiking service was troubleshooting and eliminating spyware and malware from existing computers.

Though I have been battling malware for years, it has gotten even more prevalent over the past year. I much prefer making money on adding value to people's computers rather than eliminating acquired problems from viruses, trojans and spyware.

I compare fighting spyware to a craftsman installing custom windows in new homes. This craftsman has pride in his final product of thick energy efficient

glass secured into tightly fitting windows that add value to the home.

Unfortunately, this same craftsman is pulled away from his dream job to fix broken windows because some yahoo walked up and down the street throwing rocks

at people's homes.

That craftsman makes the same money fixing the broken windows as he does installing nice new ones but does not enjoy that type of work because it basically just brings people's environment back to normal after a negative event. It is more pleasant to add value to an already stable and positive environment compared to fixing stuff that was unnecessarily messed up by some idiot.

I am this craftsman that is getting yanked off positive and fulfilling IT jobs to fix screwed up computers due to some Eastern European flunkie trying to steal or a loser spammer attempting to flood my users with junk mail.

This significant uptick in malware has forced me to look at other options to battle this nemesis. Good old AVG Antivirus has served me well for years, but recently I have seen too much spyware junk get through its filters.

For my banking and government clients I have been replacing Grisoft's AVG Antivirus with Eset Nod32 Antivirus/Antispyware software. The pricing is higher but the performance of Eset Nod32 is superior to AVG's product. The downside is that there is no free version for home users with the entry level home user price at \$39 per year.

For my business clients I will be migrating most users to Eset over the next few months, but my home users need some better protection than just the free home version of AVG.

Surprisingly enough Microsoft could be our answer with their new free Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE) antivirus/antimalware application. It came out last month and after reading some positive reviews I started test deployments onto some client home PCs that were getting hit by spyware even though they were supposedly protected by AVG Antivirus/Antispyware.

If you are interested in trying out MSE, first you need to un-

install AVG or any other antivirus software currently on your computer. Other antispyware software can co-exist but only one antivirus can be active on a computer at any one time.

The download and installation steps are quick and available from www.Microsoft.com/Security_Essentials, which should take less than 10 minutes. Although MSE is free there will be a test during the installation to verify all your software is licensed and valid under Microsoft EULA (End User License Agreement) specifications.

After the installation is completed, MSE will automatically begin downloading the latest updates and virus definitions which may take another half hour. Immediately following the update MSE will then initiate a quick scan to check for existing viral and malware infections.

By default MSE will either repair or quarantine infected files much like other antivirus software package. To view and configure MSE just click the Computer Status icon on the system tray located on the lower right of your Windows desktop.

You will see four tabs with the Home selected by default. This hopefully will show a green check box and say that your real time protection is on and the virus and spyware definitions are up to date. You can click on the Update tab to verify the definitions date and the History tab will display any bad files MSE found and fixed.

The MSE Settings tab enables users to customize several set-

tings like scheduling scans, excluding certain files, and protecting specific devices. I only made two changes to the default settings in MSE.

One was the participation in Microsoft SpyNet which I changed from Basic to Advance so I could play a more proactive role helping Microsoft knock out malware and continue to improve MSE. The second was under the Advanced tab where I enabled the second check box to scan any removable media like external hard drives and USB flash memory sticks.

The installation and update took about 170 MB of hard drive space, but since newer hard drives are at least 250 GB, the space consumption is no big deal. While protecting in real time it adds little overhead and is virtually undetectable. During the full scan however, the CPU is consumed around 40 percent for the duration of the computer scan which can run about one hour.

Over the past two weeks I have had MSE find and eliminate threats that the previous installation of AVG Free home version had missed. It is my hope this new free antivirus software from Microsoft will have continuous improvements to protect home users from those ever-increasing threats out there.

Another plus for Microsoft is that they are providing free telephone support for MSE. There have been numerous postings on blogs telling of how Microsoft techs talked them through difficult virus removal proce-

dures that MSE detected.

On a previous subject, the marketing efforts for my Conservative Talking Points iPhone App has paid off with it rising to the number one Top Paid App in the Reference category of the iTunes App Store. It was also got national exposure last Sunday morning on Fox & Friends with a three-minute news story and demonstration on the Fox News Channel!

Bottom line: It's about time that Microsoft put some real effort into protecting the Windows operating system from malware since they are the biggest targets of the bad guys.

Next week's column: TRRN
John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.