

March 4, 2003

Dear Client/Friend:

With the ever-increasing usage of computers in our daily lives, the importance of securing computer systems is often overlooked. Most corporate networks and computer systems have software and hardware in place to take care of this, but how about your home or small business? There are some quick and relatively easy steps you can take to secure your computer and your valuable data that you may not even be aware of.

The most important and sometimes overlooked aspect is password security. For starters, passwords should be at least 8 characters long, and longer if possible. Adding numbers and special characters such as exclamation points will also make your password more secure. If you feel inclined to use your child's name or your birth date as a password, remember that those types of combinations are the first ones guessed by someone trying to hack into your computer.

Even the best password in the world is no help to you if you get a virus on your computer. A virus can give complete access to your computer and all of its files without letting itself be known to the user. For this reason, remember to have the latest virus protection software installed and kept up to date. Virus software manufacturers update their definitions frequently, so be sure to update at least once a week.

Your computer's operating system, email client and web browser are also significant security risks that need to be kept as up to date as possible in order to prevent security holes from being exploited. Users of Windows computers should be sure to use the "Windowsupdate" website to keep their operating system and other Microsoft components patched to the latest versions. It is recommended to avoid using Microsoft's Outlook Express for email if at all possible, since its security holes are the most widely targeted by virus writers.

Protecting your computer from unauthorized access over the Internet is the job of a firewall. Firewalls can be software based or hardware based and are most important to have installed on a computer with broadband Internet access, such as cable or DSL. Hardware based firewalls are most commonly found incorporated into cable/DSL routers for the home and small office and are one of the easiest and most effective ways to keep prying eyes out of your computer or network. Software firewalls can be somewhat less secure than hardware firewalls, but can be cheaper than hardware firewalls. Windows XP has a firewall built in to the operating system and it should be the first thing enabled on any computer that has access to the Internet. Third party software such as Norton Internet Security or ZoneAlarm are more advanced and may offer more protection than the built in software, but any firewall is better than no firewall at all.

A more obscure type of intrusion into your computer is called spyware. Spyware can be many different things, but is most commonly innocuous looking software that quietly tracks your Internet usage and uses it for targeted marketing purposes. Examples of this type of software are Comet Cursor, Bonzi Buddy and Gator. You can check to see if you have any of these programs installed by using a program such as Ad-Aware, which can be downloaded for free from www.lavasoft.de. Removing programs such as these can enhance the speed and stability of your computer and ensure that what you do on the Internet remains your business alone.

Completely securing a computer system is not a practical thing to do. By eliminating every known security problem, you can create an almost unusable system, but fixing the common holes is easy and mostly painless. If you have any questions about security with your computer or network, please give Jeff Woeste or myself a call and we will be happy to discuss some possible solutions with you.

Very truly yours,

Matthew A. Shinker

MAS/fkb

Enclosure