

Security (General Info)

In today's computing environment, your computer is constantly at risk of attack. To protect your computer and your personal information, you need to have four security elements in place. They are:

Firewall
Spyware Removal
Adware Removal
Anti-virus

Each of these elements protects you from a different security risk, but the four working together provide a secure computer environment. For each of these elements there are both commercial and free versions of software available. Many are of high quality, while some are poor. Only the high quality ones will be discussed here.

Firewall:

A firewall can be either software or hardware (a physical component), or both. A firewall acts like a "gate" between your computer and the Internet. All communication between the Internet and your computer must pass through this gateway first, and nothing is allowed to pass unless you allow it. This prevents the "unauthorized" access of your computer, from a hacker or a renegade program on the Internet. It also prevents a subversive program hidden in your computer (like spyware) from dialing out to the Internet to transmit information about you.

Commercial versions of Firewall software can be purchased from retail outlets, but many newly purchased computers will include them already installed. These are usually "trial" versions, that work for a limited time, and then you are prompted to purchase an extended period of service, over the Internet. Some of the more popular "commercial" versions of Firewall software applications are:

McAfee
Norton
Trend Micro

Some select *free* versions of Firewall software work as well as the commercial versions. Some of the most popular versions are:

Windows Firewall (part of Windows XP Service Pack 2)
Zone Alarm
Kerio
Wyvern

Sygate

Spyware Removal:

Spyware is a small program which gets installed on your computer for the purpose of monitoring what type of WEB sites you visit. After harvesting the information, it then accesses the Internet and sends it to the source company where it is used as marketing information. (Example: visiting photography WEB sites, could result in your receiving excessive junk mail about photography equipment). Usually the spyware is installed without your knowledge. It may be installed as part of another program, which you intended to install, or it may be secretly downloaded to your computer by an Internet site that you visited. The problem with spyware, is that it invades your privacy, and it often interferes with other software in your computer, causing it to not run efficiently. Some examples of spyware removal software are:

Spybot
Spyware Guard
Spyware Blaster

Adware Removal:

Adware is a small program which gets installed on your computer for the purpose of making pop-up advertising appear on your computer monitor. Like spyware, it is usually installed on you computer without your knowledge. Also like spyware, it interferes with other programs, and causes your computer to run poorly. Many malicious programs can be considered to be both spyware and adware. Some of the most popular adware removal programs are:

Ad-Aware
NoAdware

Anti-Virus:

Of all the malicious programs that can affect your computer, the computer virus is potentially the most damaging. A computer virus can cause a program to stop working, important information to be destroyed, or even to cause your whole computer to stop working. A virus is so called, because of the way it spreads to infect other programs or other computers. A computer virus can reproduce itself and attach itself to other software files, such as an email file, and then gets passed to other computers, infecting them as it goes. Think of it being able to spread much like a human virus, such as a Flu infection. It is able to infect any unprotected file or system. Just as there are many different types of human viruses (even many types of Flu), there are also many types of computer viruses, and new versions are created everyday. The only way to be protected against all virus versions is make sure that you have a good anti-virus program in place, and

that you update it regularly to get the latest protection (serum) against the newest versions of virus that are being developed everyday.

Some of the more popular “commercial” versions of anti-virus are:

Norton
McAfee
PC Cillin
Panda
Kaspersky

Some of the most popular “free” versions of anti-virus are:

AVG
Avant

Additionally, there are free online scans that can be done without installing software, by accessing a WEB site that hosts an online scan. While these online scans can detect a virus, they do not stop you from getting infected in the first place. Some online scan sites are:

Housecall at
http://housecall.trendmicro.com/housecall/start_corp.asp

Panda Active Scan at
<http://www.pandasoftware.com/activescan/>

McAfee at
<http://us.mcafee.com/root/mfs/default.asp?cid=9435>