

Rich's Ramblings for August 2005 ©2005

Again, another reminder about Anti-virus, Spyware and Trojan protection programs. There are many free or very low cost programs that you can install that will protect you from those bad programs designed to either take over your computer or destroy it. I have on my cpcug web site a listing of the programs that I recommend and use. Most of the Free versions also have pay versions with more capability or options. This listing is on my web page at: <http://www.cpcug.org/user/schinnel> I keep it updated regularly.

My recommendations for programs and Utilities:

<http://www.lavasoftusa.com>

remover

<http://www.zonelabs.com>

software firewall

<http://www.safer-networking.org>

removal program

<http://www.vopt.com>

defragmenter

<http://www.windowsstartup.com>

inspector FREE

<http://www.registryoptimizer.com/index.asp>

http://www.grisoft.com/us/us_index.php

Virus AVG 7.0

<http://free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php>

Anti Virus AVG

<http://www.sunbeltsoftware.com>

CounterSpy

Adaware trackware

Zone Alarm

Spy Bot spyware

VOPT, the disk

Windows Startup

Registry cleaner

Grisoft's Anti

Grisoft's FREE

Sunbelt Software

Each of these programs have trial or free versions, All except the ones marked FREE have pay versions that are fully supported by the companies that make them.

Additionally, I have noticed that Verizon who is in the DSL and FIOS Internet services business have gotten wise and are now providing A modem combined with a router that provides a hardware firewall for your system/network. For a long time the DSL and Cable providers just sent you a modem which you connected to your PC and made you available to the world via the Internet Protocol number they assigned you. If you were not running a good software firewall, some of your computers Internet ports could have been compromised and allowed someone with less than honorable intentions to take control of your PC. This is how many PC's were taken over and used to blast emails and conduct what is called a DOS or Denial Of Service attack. This is where your computer would act as a robot computer which would drive a web site wild with attacks. They attempted to force many of the financial institutions to take down their web sites as they were not prepared to support millions of people attacking it on a minute by minute basis.

A router acts as a hardware firewall by acting as an IP (Internet Protocol) translator. No one on the Internet would be able to talk directly to your home computer as the Router would do a translation to protect you.

One caution with those of you receiving Wireless Router/Modems is that the wireless part of the router sometimes is setup to be open to anyone. Unless you want your neighbors to be able to access the internet thru your DSL line, I would recommend either turning the Wireless part of the router off or add encryption which is pretty easy to setup if you read the documentation included with your new modem/router.

Now that you have a hardware firewall, you might want to think about a software firewall that allows you to pick and choose which programs can go OUT to the internet. Your Router protects you from the bad guys coming into your computer. ZoneAlarm has this option to allow you to say yes or no to any program desiring to go OUT to the Internet. Windows XP has a firewall in the Service Pack 2 upgrade but it only protects you from people getting INTO your system from outside, Not for stopping programs that you have on your computer from going out..

Of course, Microsoft has an Anti-Spyware program that they provide free which will give you additional protection. Of course Windows 2000 and XP only. It is pretty close to the anti-spyware program CounterSpy that was reviewed a couple of months ago in my column. Of course you can always take a look at my past articles on cpcug's web site and look for the Monitor archives.

You might want to remember to **BACKUP BACKUP BACKUP** your important files to CD-ROM or DVD platters. This way, you won't feel sad if you suddenly can not boot your computer

or some nefarious program removes all your files from your hard disk. With the size of hard disks increasing on an exponential rate and the normal size being well over 100 Gigabytes, you might want to think about doing some serious backups. One such backup is external USB/Firewire portable hard disks. These are normally just regular hard disks in an external case with power supply and USB/Firewire cables to attach to your computer. They give warm fuzzies when you know you're protected. But remember they are to be handled carefully. I personally opt for the 2.5" hard disks like are normally in laptops. They are smaller and if you pick the correct enclosure, they will take up a lot less room. I picked up an 80Gigabyte 2.5" 5400rpm Toshiba hard disk for around \$120 and a combination USB/Firewire interface for about \$50. There is no need for an external power supply as the 2.5" hard disk does not use as much power as the larger 3.5" hard disk normally used in your desktop computer. It works and is small enough to put in my pocket if I desire. I use Norton's Ghost 9 program to make periodic backups of my Toshiba laptop. This way, I can recover my system if something disastrous happens to my computer. I burn the image to DVD's when I get around to it and then can remove the images from the external backup unit. It just works great and I get a warm fuzzy every time I backup my systems.

One last note, I have helped several friends who purchased new Dell computers which came with tons of junk programs installed. It sometimes took hours to remove them all to get the system setup the way they should be. But, I found out that if you order a system that comes with Windows XP Professional instead of XP Home, they don't seem to have as much junk pre-installed. Maybe it has been a fluke but that's been the case at least two times lately. It sure has made it much easier to setup the systems properly. Remember that this was a shipped system with XP Professional pre-installed, not an upgrade from XP Home.

Rich Schinnell is retired from Capital PC having helped other users since the early 1980's when DOS was king and Winchester disks costs almost \$100 per megabyte. He is retired from the USN and now does a small bit of computer consulting for interesting clients. He has a Macintosh Mini. He is a member of Washington Apple Pi and Capital PC. He can be reached at richnrockville@mac.com and schinnel@cpcug.org whichever turns you on. <G> A last resort is by land line at (301) 949-9292