



IT Tips and tricks #17 - Security

This month, we were going to look at security for both your pc and associated systems; however, the nice people at bCentral also thought along the same lines, so here are their views!

Antivirus Software

You probably have antivirus software - most businesses do, according to the latest DTI figures. But are you sure it's the best software you can get, is it properly installed and is it up-to-date?

To be truly effective, you need to have antivirus protection on all the computers in a network because you don't know who will download a virus from the web or open an infected email.

Similarly, you need to make sure that you are running an up-to-date version of the software with regularly updated virus signatures. Because hundreds of new viruses emerge each month, you should set the software to automatically download new signatures on a regular basis - typically once a day.

You might also consider whether your software is working properly for you. The leading suppliers, such as McAfee and Symantec, have business antivirus solutions which can simplify the management of updates and check that all the computers on a network are protected. These products are likely to be more appropriate than consumer antivirus software designed to run on a single machine.

Firewall

You've got Windows Firewall turned on? You know, the one that comes with Windows XP Service Pack 2, which you've installed, right? If not, use Windows Update to get it and follow the instructions to switch it on. Every computer on your network needs a basic firewall.

You should also consider getting a robust, commercial firewall to sit between the network and the internet as a whole. You can use the firewall in Microsoft's ISA Server. Alternatively, many ADSL routers include hardware firewalls and leading companies like Cisco and Check Point sell industrial-strength firewalls that are ideal for larger businesses.

Spam Protection

Junk email is a menace. It often transmits viruses, hogs internet bandwidth and can waste your employee's time. For single users, Microsoft Outlook 2003 includes a spam filter and you can download Microsoft's server-based spam filter for Exchange Server 2003. For older email systems, there are plenty of filters to choose from including Symantec's Brightmail Anti-spam 6.0 and various products from Cloudmark.

Content Filters

Increasingly, companies are concerned with what their employees see and do on the internet. Unfortunately, it's not always marketing research and client emails. Content filters like Clearswift's MIMESweeper can help ensure that your staff only visits appropriate websites or send and receive legitimate emails.

Spyware Prevention

Spyware is a class of software that tracks people's computer activities. It may be for almost-legitimate purposes such as advertising but it can also be used for corporate espionage or the theft of financial information like credit card details. It is a growing threat and there are several commercial programs that can scan computers for spyware, just as antivirus software looks for viruses. These include Spybot Search and Destroy and AdAware. Over the next year or so expect the major antivirus software companies to begin to integrate anti-spyware into their products but in the meantime you need some protection.