"Practice Safe Computing"

Learn the 3 Ps of Safe Computing: **Protection**, **Performance**, and **People**

What software do you need? What regular maintenance should you perform? How do you avoid scams and other threats?

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Protection

- Just like a car needs door locks, seat belts and airbags, there are certain security software choices you need to make for your computer. Check your 'Security Center' for your computer's status – Control Panel, Security Center)

- **Use one firewall**: If you practice BUCS as outlined below, the 'one-way' firewall that comes with Windows XP is sufficient. Only use one firewall. If you use a 3d party firewall such as Norton, Zone Alarm, or Comodo make sure you understand all it's settings. It *can* block you from the Internet completely if not set up correctly.

- **Use one anti-virus** program: Three good, free programs are: AVG Free, Avira, and Avast . Find them on www.Download.com

- **Use at least one anti-spyware/adware** program. Windows Defender comes preinstalled with Vista, you can download it for free for XP.   SuperAntispyware and Malwarebytes are good, too. Go to www.download.com and search for free anti-spyware. They change all the time.

Wi-Fi

- Are there extra security considerations while connected to a public Wi-Fi hotspot?

- There are a couple of minor ones (see below), but generally, it is no less safe to connect to the Internet via Wi-Fi than any other method. In a way, it"s safer, because it is a private network, inaccessible to the outside Internet. If any bad-guys are going to get to you, they must be connected to the same network. The most important thing is to do your BUCS. Any security problems we"ve seen with use of a Wi-Fi network were caused by a computer not being up-to-date, or being infected.

- Be sure you are connecting to the correct network. You need to know the name (ssid) of the hotspot. It may be starbucks, or coach, or tengo. There have been reports of fake networks calling themselves Free Wireless Internet (or something similar) trying to trap you into connecting to them. Known as Evil Twin or Man in the Middle (google for more info)

- Turn off File and Printer sharing. Wi-Fi is a network, and the original purpose of networks was to share files and printers. Now, we only want to connect to the Internet and *not* to share our files with anyone else. To turn off File and Printer sharing in Windows XP: Control Panel Networks Select your wireless network, right-click and choose properties Find the property for File and Printer sharing and Uncheck it.

- Note: Windows Vista handles this automatically thru settings for a Public network.

- Is it safe to do my online banking on a Wi-Fi network?
  Yes – your bank's website will be secure. You should see a little lock indicator on your browser's status bar. You should also see the website address starts with https – the s stands for secure. This means that anything you type on your computer will be encrypted (garbled). It remains encrypted thru the Wi-Fi network, thru the public Internet, to your bank, and back. It is completely safe. If you have any doubts, call your bank to discuss.
- Never send sensitive information in an email. Emails will *not* be encrypted. It is possible (highly unlikely, but possible) that someone could be sniffing the radio waves and actually read your email.

Is Firefox better than Internet Explorer?

- I've heard that using Netscape or FireFox means less vulnerability to viruses. Should I switch?
- Since Internet Explorer is the most popular web browser available, it is the object of more attacks than other browsers, but the other browsers are not inherently any safer. They are still subject to attacks; it just doesn't happen as often. **Keeping your software up-to-date** is the most effective protection, regardless of which browser you use.

Performance

Sticking with the car analogy … an important safety feature is to keep your car well maintained. Same with a computer. We call it BUCS: Backup, Update, Cleanup, Scan

Backup

Imagine that your computer was stolen, or it simply crashed and will not turn on any more. You could buy a new computer, reinstall or replace any software you had, but what would you be missing?

- Your job is to backup the stuff that you have created and stored on your computer. The accounting files, word processing documents, digital photos and email information. We recommend copying these files to a CD-R using a program such as Nero, or use My Computer – right click on the folder to copy and choose 'Send To CD Drive'. If you use Picasa for digital photos (we recommend it) it has a backup command.
- You can't normally backup programs and operating systems, you need the original recovery CDs that came with your computer. They will contain the operating system and the software needed to set up your computer. You also need the original CDs of other software you have purchased. All these CDs will be needed if your computer crashes or needs to be reformatted at some time – keep them in a safe place. **Take them with you on extended travels.** Better yet, make copies and take the copies with you.
- Email address books: You should have an extra copy of all your email addresses. If you use an email program on your computer like Outlook, or Eudora – then make a copy to an online account like Gmail. See video on 'Importing Contacts to Gmail'. If you use an online email program like Gmail or Hotmail, make a copy of your address book to your computer. Search your email program for help on 'Downloading.'
- Can I use the USB 'Flash Drive' to backup? Not recommended. The little 'thumb' drives are great for temporary storage, but for permanent copies we recommend CD-Rs (or DVD-Rs) and external USB hard drives. DVDs simply store more.

What is System Restore?

> System restore is a different kind of backup. Your system settings reside in a file called the Registry. That gets backed up automatically on a regular basis. When you've recently installed something that seems to have 'broken' your system, System Restore can take your system back to the state it was in before the install.
> Start / All Programs / Accessories / System Tools / System Restore

Update

- What do you need to keep updated?
  > **Windows:** Download your Windows Updates regularly. You must install all 'Critical Updates' as soon as they are available. From your browser, select Tools/Windows Updates and follow the instructions. It is best to have automatic updates turned on.
  > **Virus Definitions:** Most anti-virus programs, like AVG, have an automatic update feature. You should know how to check your software and see the date of the definitions is it using. If you leave your computer on and online, the update can happen in the middle of the night every night.
  > **Spyware/Adware Definitions:** Same as anti-virus programs.
  > **Software Updates:** especially your web browser. Internet Explorer is usually updated as part of your Windows Update, but, if you use Firefox, it has its own regular security updates. Check it with Help, About Firefox
  > **Hardware drivers or firmware:** Go to the website for your hardware manufacturer and search for updates. You need to know your exact make and model. If you have a 'Service Tag' That really helps. Do this regularly.

Cleanup

> **Cleanup means to delete stuff:** Unnecessary software - A brand new computer especially comes with a lot of junk installed. 1. Old documents 2. Old programs: need to 'uninstall' them. 3. All temp files.

- Should I delete 'Cookies' and Temporary Internet files
  > Some 'Cookies' are good. They store things like your username and password for Amazon.com. Sometimes cookies can clog your system and you need to start fresh. In your browser, Tools, Internet Options, Delete Cookies, Delete files. ***Be sure you have a record of all your usernames and passwords somewhere.***

- How do I delete temporary files (different from temporary Internet files) that are clogging up my computer?
  > My Computer / right-click on C / Properties / Disk Cleanup. In Vista you can click on Start and type 'cleanup' or … better yet, type Performance, choose 'Performance Information and Tools.' Vista will show you several ways to improve performance.

- When would I use a 'Registry Cleaner' program?
  > If your computer still acts strange after all you've done your updates, scans and cleanups, a Registry Cleaner may help. You need to do your research on which one to use. We recommend going to www.download.com and searching for Registry Cleaner. You can limit search to Free programs. Not all registry cleaners are good. You should back up your registry first. (run Regedit.exe and Export or set a System Restore point to go back to) We have had good luck with Eusing, CCleaner, and Windows Live Onecare.

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Scan & Defrag

- What do I use to scan my computer for problems?
    1. Scan for disk problems with the utility that comes with Windows. Open 'My Computer', right click on C drive and choose properties, then Tools, then Check Now.
    2. Scan regularly (usually every day) for viruses with your virus-checking software.
    3. Scan for spyware & adware with Defender, Spybot Search & Destroy and AdAware.
    4. Once in a while, you should use an online scanner for a second opinion! We like Windows Live Onecare free safety scanner. See the Geeks on Tour video on 'Safe Computing: Scan with Microsoft OneCare Live'
- What is defrag and how often should I use it?
    Defrag is a disk-organizing utility that can be found at My Computer / right click on C / Properties / Tools. How often you need to run it depends on how much you use your computer. Once every month or two should be sufficient for most users. In Vista you can easily schedule defrag to happen automatically on a schedule. Just click Start and type 'defrag' open the Disk Defragmenter and you'll see the place to set a schedule.

When do you need a new computer?

- Regardless of your best efforts, if you use your computer a lot and frequently use the Internet, your computer will probably need to be reformatted (empty it out and start over) by the time it's over 2 years old. And, by 4 years, you may need a new computer. Be Prepared. If something is going wrong with a computer over 4 years old – it's time to get a new one. It's not advised to put any money into a 4+ year old computer.
- See our article "7 Tips for Buying a New Computer" on our Articles Blog at www.WiFiSavvy.com

People

There are 'bad guys' on the web, just like everywhere else. A big danger is falling for 'scams' and unintentionally inviting malicious software into your computer. A firewall won't prevent downloading something you've requested. It's up to you to be aware.

> DO NOT – download 'smiley faces', weather bugs, or other cute software that is offered for free. These are usually not totally free – most come with spyware attached. We recommend downloading from www.download.com . We trust that software downloaded from there is safe. DO NOT – believe any email that tells you to give them your credit card numbers or passwords. This is called 'Phishing' - clever scams that make you believe your bank is asking for verification. NEVER send private information in an email – period. The best information on this can be found at https://www.paypal.com/fightphishing

Watch the Geeks on Tour Video: How to Avoid Email Scams

Just like a safe car driver, it is up to you to be educated about the rules of the Information Highway!

- Subscribe to Geeks on Tour Newsletter.
- www.SARC.com is a good place to find the latest virus information
- Watch Geeks on Tour videos. www.GeeksOnTour.com Safe Computing Tutorial Videos. Some are free, you need to become a member at $39/year to view them all.
- Subscribe to other newsletters you trust. Some recommended newsletters: www.komando.com, www.windowssecrets.com, www.askbobrankin.com , www.wxpnews.com ,
- Watch videos at http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/videos/default.mspx
- Check out suspected hoaxes at www.snopes.com or www.hoaxkill.com
- Google it! e.g. type the exact error message into google and you'll learn what to do.

Should I upgrade to Windows Vista or Windows7?

- When you buy a new computer, it will come with the newest operating system and that is appropriate. You wouldn't get a new car with an old engine would you?
- Normally, we do not recommend upgrading an older computer to the newer operating system. Hardware and software of the same 'vintage' work best together.