

BASICS & BEYOND -- Session #13 -- March '09

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Spyware – Adware – Malware -- A quick refresher

Spyware -- Although difficult to clearly define, Spyware is usually a program that sneaks onto your computer, without your knowledge or consent, with the intent to do harm. This “harm” can run the gamut from collecting personal data about you and your computer, watching where you are going on the web, redirecting you to web sites, installing unwanted software, changing your computer settings, etc., etc. For the most part, any Spyware that is placed onto your computer is dangerous and may well be harmful.

Adware -- This type of software is normally put onto your computer for the purpose of displaying advertising, and is usually a non-invasive type program. However, some Adware can be described as invasive and even considered as a “spyware” program. It might well track your web browsing habits and report this information back to its originator. The program might not be life threatening to your computer, but one does not want this type of program watching your searching habits and collecting personal data.

Malware -- This type of software, again placed on your computer without your consent is, as the name implies, “malicious software”. Malware includes, among others, viruses, Trojan horses, crimeware and worms. All of these programs, which can come from email and the World Wide Web, have been developed by bad, nasty people to create pure havoc with your computer.

Blocking and eliminating -- The best way to keep your computer clean from these threats is to have programs in place that will block them from being allowed to enter your computer, or to remove them should your computer become infected. **Spybot S & D**, by Safer-Networking, (www.safer-networking.org) is a free program that will eliminate virtually all Spyware from your computer, should you become infected. **Ad-Aware**, by Lavasoft, (www.lavasoft.com) is another free program that will block, or eliminate any adware that your computer might pick up.

Malware can be kept at bay by having a good, up to date, anti-virus program. **AVG Free** (www.free.avg.com) remains an excellent free anti-virus program for this purpose, and it also contains an anti-spyware feature, which is constantly on alert. Remember, you should have only one anti-virus program installed on your computer, but you may have more than one spyware and adware blocking program.

MS Windows Defender -- This is a free Microsoft malware blocking program that comes with the Vista operating system, but must be downloaded from Microsoft for Windows XP. (“google” MS Windows Defender). You can find out if you have Windows Defender installed, and functioning, by going to **Start > All Programs > Windows Defender > Tools > Options**. AVG says that you can run Windows Defender along side AVG Anti-Virus, but Norton and McAfee do not recommend it.

Remember, your computer is only safe from Spyware, Adware and Malware if you keep your programs up to date. Download “updated definitions” religiously if you do not have automatic updating turned on. And, of course, run your scans on a regular interval.

“Short cut” your favorite web site -- Do you have a favorite website that you’d like to go directly to from your desktop without having to open your browser, clicking on “Favorites” and then clicking on the link ? Well, it’s simple to set up. Open your browser, click on “Favorites” and hi-lite the website that you want to go to. After hi-lighting the link right click for a menu and select “Send To”, and then select “Desktop (create a shortcut)” and left click. This “Favorites” web site will be placed on your desktop and when you click on it, it will open your browser and go directly to the website, with just one easy click.

Too many icons on your desktop ?? -- If you find you have too many icons on your desktop but you don’t want to remove them, consider creating a new folder on your desktop and putting the icons inside this folder. For example, I have a folder called “Utilities” in which I keep my Ad-Aware, Spybot, AutoLogic Disk Defragmenter, Revo Uninstaller and various other “utility” icons. These are programs that I don’t use all the time, but I want them available when I do want, or need, to use them. Follow these easy steps to create a folder such as a “Utilities” folder. In both Win-XP and Vista place your cursor on a blank area on your desktop and right click. Select **NEW** on the menu and then select **FOLDER** on the ensuing menu. Immediately you will see a “New Folder” on your desktop, and the name “New Folder” will be hi-lited. To rename the “New Folder” simply hit the DELETE or BACKSPACE key and type in the name of your choice. Then, drag the icons you want to place into this new folder by putting your cursor over the icon, hold down the left mouse button and drag the icon to the new folder. When you have the icon over the “new folder” release the left mouse button and the icon will magically be placed into the “new folder”.

If you later decide that you really don’t want that icon in the “new folder” simply open the “new folder”, Hi-lite the icon, hold down the left mouse button and drag the icon back onto the desktop and release it.

Missing tool bars -- Occasionally we find that we are missing a “tool bar” on our mail program, or Internet Explorer. For some strange reason they just seem to disappear. Well, not to worry. Put your cursor on a blank area on one of the remaining “tool bars” and right click to get a menu. You should be able to recover the missing “tool bar” by selecting it and left clicking, which will put a check mark next to the missing “tool bar” and return it to its proper place. Conversely, if you find you have more “tool bars” than you need follow the above procedure and when you left click on the one you want to eliminate it will take the check mark away and remove the “tool bar”.

MS PowerPoint Presentation viewer -- If you downloaded the PowerPoint viewer and you are still having trouble opening an attachment with a “.pps” extension (PowerPoint Presentation slide show) when you receive the attachment in an email, try the following: Right click on the attachment and from the ensuing menu click “Save AS”. It will save the attachment to “My Documents” and give you an option to rename it, if you so desire. Then, go to “My Documents”, hi-lite the file, right click for a menu and click on “Open With” and select MS PowerPoint viewer. Hopefully the attachment will open.

Changing desktop icon size -- Vista users only. Are the icons on your desktop too large, or too small? Put your cursor on an empty space on your desktop and right click. Next, left click on “View” and select the icon size of your choice. Are your icons all over the place on your desktop? You can click on “Align to Grid” to arrange them in a more orderly and neatly manner, or you can even “Auto Arrange” them.

Computer survival kit -- If you had a computer “crash” right this minute do you know where all the information for your computer is located, so that you can get it back up and running quickly? It is very important that you keep all of your computer information together, in one place, and an easy way to do

this is to keep it all in a Ziploc baggie. In this bag you should have, at a minimum, the following: Your computer operating manual; Windows operating system disc; any discs relating to hardware on your computer; any “product keys” or passwords required for installing software. You might also want to have your major program discs, such as MS Office in your baggie. Then, if a computer problem arises you will have everything you need to resolve the problem in one place. Take a few minutes and do this. You may one day be happy you did.

Re-installing your operating system -- Hopefully one will never have to do this, but in all probability if you keep your computer long enough you may well end up doing it. Re-installing your OS is not an extremely difficult job to do, but it can be a very, very time consuming operation. There are way too many details involved to even get into the basics of a re-installation process, here, but, I am listing a few items to keep in mind if you do: Vista is by far the easiest to re-install as there is only one Service Pack (SP 1) involved. With Win-XP there are three Service Packs involved. After re-installing Win-XP you must re-install SP 2 before SP 3, as SP 3 does not include all of the Windows updates found in SP 2. However, SP 2 does include all the updates included in SP 1, so it is not necessary to re-install SP 1. SP 2 can be downloaded but it is a tricky download. By far the best way is to install SP 2 from a CD. I maintain articles on how to re-install your Operating System and I also have Win-XP SP 2 on a CD. Please do not hesitate to call me if you find you need to re-install your Op System and you would like to borrow this info.

Hardware Drivers -- A “driver” is simply a software program that allows and tells your computer how to interact with a specific piece of hardware. For example, the following hardware all have “drivers”: a hard drive, DVD/CD drive, monitor, video card and sound card. If you have a piece of hardware that is acting funny, or strange, you should check to see if the manufacturer has updated their driver for that hardware. Quite often hardware manufacturers will update their “drivers” to fix a “bug” in a “driver” program. “Windows Update” should automatically advise you of new drivers available for the hardware on your computer, but it pays to periodically check to see if there is a new “driver”, that Windows Update might have missed.

In Vista click on **Start > Control Panel > Hardware & Sound > Device Manager**. When Device Mgr. opens double click on a specific item, for example **Monitor**, and then double click on the monitor that is shown. When the ensuing “Properties” box opens click on the **Driver tab** and then click on **Update Driver** and select **Search Automatically for updated driver**. MS Windows will search and advise you as to whether there is, or is not, an updated driver available for that piece of hardware. If there is it is recommended that you download the driver.

In Win-XP the process of updating a “driver” is a little more complicated. If you are going to manually update a “driver” you need to know the model number of the hardware you want to update, and the version number of the “driver”. You can probably find this information by going to Device Manager and selecting the item. If you do not have an updated driver on a CD then you will have to go online to a driver source, such as www.drivers.com and search for an updated driver. Hopefully, Windows Update will relieve you of having to do this.