

Computer Corner

Update Your Software To Keep Your Computer—And Your Information—Safe

(NAPSA)—Viruses, worms, Trojans—you've likely heard or read about them. They're the nefarious "creatures" that can take advantage of vulnerabilities in the software applications you have installed on your computer—but you can defeat them. That's good news, because if they find their way into your computer, they can wreak havoc, destroying your files, stealing your personal information, even taking control of your computer to help with other insidious cybercrimes. Chances are, if you haven't already been a victim of some kind of malware, you could be soon, especially if you don't keep your software applications current by installing the security updates that software vendors provide.

Staying up to date on the latest security patches is critical given today's threat environment. In addition to the many security initiatives that software companies engage in to keep their products and users safe, the single most important advice they give is to always stay up to date. "Research shows that up to 99.8 percent of successful cyberattacks today exploit software that is not current with the latest security updates," says Brad Arkin, senior director, security, Adobe products and services. "We strongly recommend that users install the latest security updates."

Recently, Skype, the popular service that lets you make phone calls using the Internet, commissioned a survey that revealed:



Locking out malware from your computer may be easier than you think.

- 40 percent of adults don't always update software on their computers when initially prompted to do so.

- Approximately 25 percent of those surveyed said they don't clearly understand what software updates do and an equal percentage don't understand the benefits of updating.

- While 75 percent of adults receive update notifications from their software, more than half admitted that they needed to see a prompt between two and five times before downloading and installing the update.

For most people, then, updating software is more often than not an afterthought. Many complain that the process is intrusive and bothersome. It's just easier to click the "remind me later" button when you're busy finishing up the weekly sales report or adding your latest vacation photos to your online album. If you do, however, you leave yourself vulnerable to

threats that could take you offline for a long time—or worse.

Making Updates Easier

The good news is that times have changed. Companies continuously look for ways to make the update process less cumbersome for users. For example, the very widely used Adobe Reader—which lets you open and read ubiquitous PDF documents—uses a new update mechanism designed to keep you current in a much more streamlined and automated way. With the new updater, Windows users have the option to choose to download and install updates automatically. You can literally "set it and forget it." Once your update preferences are set to update your software automatically, Adobe Reader and Acrobat will automatically check for new updates and download and install available updates—you won't have to think about it again.

So the next time you get a pop-up window telling you to update that software application, your best move is to do it right then. If your software offers an automatic update option, enable it. Don't wait. It's too easy to forget and it's too easy for cybercriminals to get to you.

If your software reminds you again a few days later (and maybe again a few days after that), it's just doing its job, reminding you to do yours. It's not another update, just a friendly way to tell you how important it is to stay up to date.