

FIX YOUR PC YOURSELF AND SAVE HUGE!

What the Big Boys Won't Tell You.

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Making your computer run well isn't as easy as it used to be. People used to get by with a simple Scan Disk and a Disk Defragment. That isn't the case anymore with advancing technologies. Threats such as spyware and adware are making their way into our systems without our knowledge. Argument sake aside the one thing that needs to happen is to educate the user on what they have done or what they can do to prevent computer slowdowns.

“But, I already have an antivirus software running. So I should be okay.” Is the answer I have heard so very often. That is like saying that you got a flu shot and now you’re safe against other threats such as a headache or sore throat. Not everything that slows a computer down is a virus as most people would like to call it. Let me go over some of the classifications.

Spyware- Is usually software that was installed that gathers information without the user’s knowledge, while the user is online. The use of this info is used for advertising purposes. An example would be that you went to your favorite website to check out your fantasy football league or some new gossip about a favorite actor or actress. Then all of a sudden out of nowhere comes pop ups about what you just typed in. Now more then likely this information was sent back to the spyware creator and in return you get popups of information that you were looking up. . Spyware can even acquire email addresses and credit card numbers that you have used online.

You make ask. “It’s only a popup. How is that slowing down my system?” That brings me back to the sending back information to the creator. The info being sent uses your

bandwidth or your speed at which you can send and receive data over the internet. To put it in easier to understand terms pretend you're on a highway and you have vehicles that are constantly getting on and off the highway interrupting your routine of going from point A to point B. This is what spyware does, it constantly send and receives information about your computer to the creator slowing you down on your way down the highway.

That is just one of the reasons spyware can slow you down. Spyware is an independent program it can run in the background without your knowledge. In other words in can run without you knowing. This also means that spyware is now using your system and memory resources. Ever have your homepage change on you when you didn't change it? More then likely you have spyware or some sneaky kids. Spyware can be like a nosey neighbor looking over your shoulder as spyware can and will monitor your keystrokes and scan the files on your hard drive.

“My buddy must have visited an adult website when I wasn't looking, because I think I have spyware now!” Adult

websites aren't the only place that you can get spyware from. Spyware can also be picked up from P2P or peer to peer programs such as Limewire or Kazaa. Never now you might have installed the spyware yourself without even knowing. "What do you mean?" When you installed that sweet new game or program that you just downloaded off the internet did you read the licensing agreements? Some places even tell you that they are going to install their spyware software on your computer. They hide the information in the agreements. Have you ever read everything in the licensing agreement? Probably not, I know I don't. What a perfect place to hide that tidbit of information. Where nobody is going to read it. A tip to protect yourself on this one is if the site that you got the program from seems a little shady; take a quick glance at the agreements just to make sure its not installing any third party software programs that you don't want installed. How do I get rid of the spyware now? Read on we'll go over that soon.

Adware- Adware is usually a program that does just that. It's software that shows ads. These ads can show up at anytime even when you're not looking at a webpage. "Who put this on

my computer?” Some freeware programs are bundled with adware to help cover the cost of the software. Not all adware is bad as it only runs when the program runs, but some adware is very destructive. Finding ways to get into your computer called exploits. Adware authors get the information about you in the same manner as spyware but the really bad thing is the information could be sold to a third party. “What are some signs of adware on my computer?” Some adware programs install a toolbar on your browser. Also getting redirected to a website you didn’t intend to go to. “Why don’t I just uninstall the adware software?” Sometimes you can, but the price you pay is that you won’t be able to use the freeware program that you download in the first place. You have to keep B installed if you want to use A kind of setup.

Adware authors can be very deceptive when it comes to marketing as they will display an ad that says “Your system is infected with insert random virus name here. Click here to download Super Duper Virus remover program to fix your system now!” They will tell you that you have an infection and try to sell you their program to fix it. Which in all reality you

don't have that infection to begin with, and they try to sell you something to fix it. That's somebody I really want to do business with.

"I won! I'm the 1,233,354 visitor to a random web site; I need to click the banner to receive my prize!" click "To claim your prize enter your email address and other personal information here." This scam has been around for a long time. Your email inbox should be called the city dump after this one as its going to get filled with junk mail (spam) after this. Don't believe me? Ask all your friends how many free prizes they have received from clicking those types of banner ads. More than likely the answer will be zero.

Trojan Horse- This is something that you might have downloaded some file and come to find out it was something else entirely. An example of this would be downloading a new theme for your computer. Everything sounded cool in the description. "Hmmm.. I clicked the file and nothing happened." Something happened alright. You just got lied to. What just happened was a Trojan horse was installed. "What does that mean?" Well if you go back in time to the time of Troy. A

Trojan horse was thought to be offered as a peace offering to the Trojans. So the people brought the Trojan horse inside the city walls. Once inside the city walls the Trojan horse's hidden surprise was about to be unveiled. The stomach of the horse was hollow and was also a hiding spot for enemy soldiers. The soldiers snuck out and unlocked the city walls to let in the rest of the soldiers to take over Troy. This is what just happened to you. No the Greeks just didn't take over your city, but the same concept happened. The desktop theme you just downloaded was the peace offering; you let the offering into your city better known as your computer system. Once inside your computer system the soldiers (aka. the infected files) secretly unlocked the city doors, which in computer terms it unlocked backdoors and other vulnerabilities into your computer. Now your computer can be used remotely by other users, send emails, install other destructive programs.

Trojan horses don't reproduce like virus do, but they can be just as vicious. The most common ways to receive a Trojan horse is threw an email attachment, that brings up the point of being cautious of email attachments from people that you do not

know. Another way is downloading a file that looks to be of use and turns out to be a Trojan horse. Peer to peer programs are another medium for a Trojan horse to travel. So instead of getting a new background for your computer from a P2P you get a little program that is going to open the door for people to get in your computer and steal your personal data.

Virus- This baby takes care of itself. Once installed it replicates itself threw the computer. A virus acts like a stray dog that comes up to you on the street, you don't know if he wants to be petted or if he wants to bite you. "How do you figure that?" Well some viruses are benign and don't do anything but make their presence known by putting an annoying message on the screen or something on a small scale like that. Then you have some viruses that are going to bite you in the rear by reformatting your hard drive deleting your personal files, damaging programs that you have paid for. Even though the smaller scale viruses aren't designed to destroy your system they can still have a negative impact by using up system memory that should be used by your programs. This can cause off the wall behavior and cause your computer to crash.

A whole network could be infected with one computer that is infected with the virus and it is accessed across the network for use on another computer. “I had a virus the other day on my computer so I just did a system restore on it and went back a day before I got the virus. So everything is cool.” Not cool! Virus creators are getting more sophisticated. Just because you did a system restore doesn’t mean that you got rid of the virus, viruses now a days can infect the recovery files on your system so you think you got rid of the virus but in all reality it’s more then likely still there. Viruses can now infect the boot sector of the computer. That’s the files that tell the computer how to boot. So if those are infected you already have a problem, but things on that front are starting to look up as newer operating systems have protection for the boot sector. The most common ways to get a virus is from email attachments. Most people confuse spyware and adware as viruses but they are quite different.

Worm- This thing is another one that reproduces itself. A worm doesn’t need your help to send itself across the network to infect other computers. It differs from a virus by not needing to attach itself to another program. A common payload for a

worm is to install a backdoor on your computer. These backdoors are used to create “zombies”. Not resurrected dead people but a computer that the worm creator can control.

Worms look for vulnerabilities in your system and infect that way.

Most people use the term “virus” as a generic term for spyware, adware, worms, and Trojan horses. The most common difference between worms, viruses, and Trojan horses are the delivery method.

"So is that all I have to worry about to keep my system running well, is to avoid the viruses?" Well that helps, but there is so much more to it than that.

Heat- Excessive heat in a system can cause slowdowns. "I keep the AC on in my house, so it's not that warm." Nice thought, but its not going to help out your pc. More then likely dust is the key factor in the heat issue. Dust acts like a blanket on the computers electrical parts by not letting the heat dissipate. "But I dust every week. My house is spotless." Clean house or dirty house dust can get into a system either way. Your power supply on your computer acts as a vacuum sucking air in to cool itself

and other internal parts, depositing dust particles along the way. Heat issues can turn off your system if your motherboard has a set point to do so. This is to protect your system from damage. Overheating can also cause programs to run poorly or crash entirely. "So should I use Pledge or a feather duster to get the dust out of my system?" Both are bad ideas. Liquid and the static from the duster are not a good choice to make. To get the dust out of your system take the cover off your PC. Some people get intimidated by doing this, but no worries as it is one of the simplest tasks in making your computer run better. Once you have the cover removed use a can of compressed air to blow the dust off of the electronic parts and other areas of your computer case. Don't forget the power supply either. This will save on problems down the road. Once everything is looking good turn the PC on, go ahead it won't hurt anything. Take a look inside and make sure all the fans are running correctly. If they are fine, go ahead and turn the PC off and put the cover back on. If a fan is not working get it repaired ASAP.

"So how do I get rid of these viruses and other pests?"

Well now its time for the meat and potatoes of this book. There

is strength in numbers when it comes to eradicating threats. By this I mean one anti-virus software can't totally protect your system. Your anti-virus is going to need some backup. In terms of an anti-spyware, anti-adware setup. "Great this is where my wallet starts to get light." Nope not this time. Only thing we need you to pay is attention. An anti-virus that I use personally is Avast. The home edition is free. All that needs to be done is register with them so you can receive an unlock key so that you can use the full version of this software I have never received one bit of junk mail from them so don't worry about entering it in to register. Your email addy is needed just as means of sending you the unlock code. To download Avast Home Edition visit <http://www.avast.com> or for a direct link to the file [CLICK HERE](#).

If you like the home version and would like to purchase the professional version for your business or office for the direct link to the pro version [CLICK HERE](#). The pro version offers added features that the home version doesn't offer.

Now that you have the viruses and some Trojan horses out of the way lets get to the spyware problem. My free program of choice on this particular topic is SuperAntiSpyware. This

program has found many problems that many other programs miss. Here is the direct link to [SuperAntiSpyware](#) Free Edition download. Once again the free version gets the job done just fine, but if you want better protection consider the professional version of [SuperAntiSpyware](#). Download this program and run a complete scan of your pc. If the scan shows anything that you are unsure quarantine the items.

Updates- Now would be a good time to make sure you have your windows updated. Windows update can put the stop to security exploits and other vulnerabilities. New ways to get into your computer are discovered all the time. Microsoft uses Windows Update to help you out with this problem. Windows Update also updates some programs to the latest version, like Windows Media Player. Certain drivers can also be downloaded through Windows update. “So where is this Windows Update?”

Windows Update can more than likely be found by clicking the Start button in the bottom left hand corner of the screen. One of the options that pop up should be Windows Update. When the programs opens choose the options that you would like to use.

After some updates your PC will have to be restarted, this is okay to do.

Firewall- So, do you have a firewall? “Yea it’s in my car isn’t it?” Yep, your right, but it’s not the one I’m talking about. A firewall is either a piece of hardware or software that filters your network connection to keep unwanted people out. To make it easy to understand a firewall think of it like this. You own a nightclub and your doorman is your firewall. You send a request to invite people to your club. Your guest shows up, but the local problem causer trys to sneak in without being noticed. Your doorman tells you that the problem causer wants to come in. So you get to decide if you want to put him on the list of allowed guests into your club/computer. If he’s not what you wanted then send him on his way. Your doorman/firewall will keep him at bay. Firewalls can come in either hardware or software versions. The newer versions of Windows come with a software version of a firewall. If you have a router more then likely it is equipped with a firewall. This is known as a hardware firewall. You can download a free firewall from zonealarm.com,

but if you want to purchase a hardware firewall you can purchase one [HERE](#).

Back Ups- "I keep everything on my computer. Important documents, family pictures, favorite web sites. Since everything is running great I should just keep doing what I'm doing and I shouldn't have any problems. Should I?" In a perfect world you should have nothing to worry about. But in the real world problems happen. Hard drives fail, data gets accidentally deleted, theft happens. "So what can I do?" You could backup your data. So that way if a hard drive fails and it had five years of family pictures on it. It won't be such a loss. You'll have a backup copy. I have found that HD Clone works great for backing up a complete drive or partition. The only problem that I have found with this is that the target drive must be of a larger capacity than the source. This restriction gets lifted on the paid version of the software. But with advances in technology and the price of larger drives going down, the free version should work just fine. The link to HD Clone can be found on our website. In case you forgot the address is <http://www.clhcomputers.com>. Remember you can also have your questions answered in our

forum. You can also back up your data on CD's or DVD's. The shelf life on these mediums far outweighs the life expectancy of a stored drive. Most CD/DVD burning software titles come with a backup utility. Leave these copies somewhere safe. You might even consider leaving a copy at your parent's home or with a trustworthy friend, as floods and house fires do happen.

"Okay I don't have any viruses or anything else like that, yet my PC doesn't seem to run as fast as it used to." A possibility for this slowdown could be programs running in the background. This includes the programs running in the taskbar, (the toolbar in the very bottom right hand corner) all of these programs are running and using your PC's resources. To cure this problem we need to run msconfig. Msconfig is a program that lists the programs and files that run when your computer is turned on. No need to download this as it's already installed on your system. "I've never seen it listed in my programs menu, how do I access it then?" To get to msconfig click your start button (bottom left). Find "Run" in the list and click that. A box will popup, you will enter "msconfig" in the box. Hit enter, a menu will popup. Click the tab that says "Startup". A list will

appear. This list shows what starts when Windows starts. To disable a program from starting up, uncheck the box on the same line as the program. Only uncheck the ones you know you won't be using. An example would be that RealPlayer starts at every startup, and you don't want it to. Uncheck the box; the program is still usable it just doesn't start when the computer is turned on. If you are unsure of something in the list, ask us about it in our forum. Once you are satisfied with your choices click the okay button. A box will popup asking if you would like to restart your computer now or later. Your changes will take place after you restart. After your PC has booted back up a dialog box will appear stating that changes have been made. Be sure to check the box that says "Do not display again", otherwise it will popup every restart. Programs should load faster now if the unloaded programs were of significant size.

Popups- Popups can come from adware and spyware, but some popups are scripted to popup when you look at certain sites. Some popups are wanted. When clicking a link on site to check out the content that you wanted and it opens up a new window is an example of a good popup. This is because it is

info that you wanted to receive. An example of a bad popup is one that pops up when you don't want it to. Newer versions of IE or Internet Explorer have a popup blocker installed with them. If you have an older version of IE or just want a little more protection then I would suggest downloading "POW". It is a free popup program available from analog-x.com. It is a very small program so downloading it only takes a few seconds. That's a good thing for people that still use dial-up internet access. Once installed it is easily configurable. If a popup makes it onto your screen don't close it, but open POW and click on it. It should be in your taskbar bottom right. Click on it, find the tab that says add/remove popup. Now a box will popup with the names of the IE pages that are open. Find the one that you don't want to see and double click it. It will be saved to a file. Click OK, when a popup with that name pops up, it will be closed immediately, you might not even see it open.

Checkdisk/Scandisk- Checkdisk and scandisk are basically the same thing. It depends on the version on Windows being run. In a nutshell checkdisk checks your computer for disk errors. Normally I will run checkdisk every week to two

weeks, just to keep things in check. Running checkdisk before backing up your data is recommended, to ensure your backups are error free. To those that don't know how to get to checkdisk. Find the icon that says "My Computer". Double click on it and find the "C:" drive, right click your mouse on it and click "Properties". A dialog box will pop up. Click the "tools" tab. From there you should see an option that says "Error Checking". Click the "Check Now" It will want to check for errors on reboot. When you are ready go ahead and reboot. After that let it do its thing. When it's done it will continue to load windows.

Corruption- Sometimes Windows files can go bad. Improper shutdowns, viruses overwriting needed system files are just some of the ways files can go bad. Solution...Better have some backups.

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This covers the basics on making your PC run better. Any questions that you may have can be answered by posting them in our forum. Which is available at www.clhcomputers.com then click forum. Send us an email with things you would like to see

in the next edition. You can contact us at

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