

Keeping Up With Computer Maintenance

Recipients of ERA's monthly Southern California Chapter newsletter enjoy the benefit of regularly receiving tech tips from Kim Komando (www.komando.com). Komando is the host of an American talk radio program covering computers and technology, *The Kim Komando Show*, which is syndicated on more than 450 radio stations in the United States and is one of the top 10 most-listened-to radio programs in the country.

Some of the subjects she's addressed in the last few months include PC security and protecting a new PC.

PC Security

A study conducted by America Online and the National Cyber Security Alliance showed that 61 percent of computers were compromised by spyware, compared to 80 percent one year ago. Among computers that had active viruses, the figure fell from 19 percent to 12 percent. (For an additional discussion of spyware, readers should refer to the February 2006 "Tech for Reps" column in *Agency Sales*.)

The study that she cites indicates that 80 percent of the 354 computers studied lacked an important piece of security — anti-spyware or anti-virus software, or a firewall. (The January 2006 "Tech for Reps" column included a discussion on firewalls.) Other computers had the software, but had misconfigured it.

Protecting a new PC

Komando warns that for anyone who's the recipient of a new Windows computer, it's vulnerable to viruses, scams and unwanted advertising. Before going online, lock down your computer by completing the following steps in order:

- **Establish a firewall** — "Unless your new PC has been sitting in a warehouse for more than a year, it should have Microsoft Windows XP Service Pack 2. This update tightened the operating system's security. One way it did this was by having Windows Firewall automatically enabled. But it's best to verify that the firewall is indeed working. To do that, click Start, Control Panel, Windows Firewall. Ensure that the circle next to "On" is checked. Also, check the "Don't allow exceptions" box. This blocks all requests to connect to your computer from other programs, but still allows you to connect to the Internet."

- **Update Windows** — "After you've ensured that Windows Firewall is enabled, it's time to update Windows. Microsoft periodically patches holes in Windows that could be accessed by hackers. The computer will need to be connected to the Internet to download the updates. To update Windows, click Start, All Programs, Windows Update. This will open your web browser and automatically take you to Windows Update's web page. Once



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there, click "Express." Some updates require that you restart the computer. Continue with Windows Update until there are no more critical updates to download."

- **Prevent viruses** — "Most new computers come with anti-virus software preinstalled. Find and start the anti-virus program, then locate its update feature. These updates include definitions, which identify viruses. As new viruses are written, definitions must be updated. This is a never-ending process. Typically, anti-virus programs that come with new computers are only good for a short trial period. After that, the program will continue to run and monitor your system, but it will

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do so with old virus definitions. That’s better than nothing, but not by much.”

- **Stop the spies** — “Viruses aren’t the only bad things that can invade your computer. Spyware and adware are just as prevalent. Adware sits on your computer and feeds ads to you. Spyware collects information about you and reports back to a computer over the Internet. Ads tailored to your interests are returned to your computer. Far worse are keyloggers. These programs record your keystrokes and e-mail them to crooks. They are used to steal passwords and credit card numbers. Keyloggers are numerous and very dangerous. They are distributed via spam.”

According to Komando, a number of programs are effective in fighting off adware and spyware. Anti-spyware software must be updated just as anti-virus programs. After installing the program, update its definitions.

- **Extra protection** — Komando continues, “Once those steps are completed your computer is secure enough to surf the web. But you can still improve things. Consider a stronger firewall. You might also want to consider a security suite. McAfee (www.mcafee.com/us), Panda Software (www.pandasoftware.com), Symantec (www.symantec.com) and Zone Labs (www.zonelabs.com) offer anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall capabilities in one package.”

Backing Up Data

In another column, Komando recounted this encounter with one of her listeners who had inadvertently deleted Outlook Express, along with her e-mail.

“I’m amazed that such a thing could happen accidentally. Nonetheless, it raises the question, What now? So let’s start from the beginning. When you delete something, it disappears. However, it isn’t gone. It’s just hidden from Windows.

“The hard drive has a type of index. When you double-click a file to open it, the index tells the read-write heads on the drive where to find the file’s parts. Normally, they’re scattered around.

When a file is deleted, the index link is broken. So if you then told Windows to open the file, it wouldn’t know where to look. But the file is still on the hard drive. The hard drive has been told that the space occupied by the file can be used. Until it is, the file is intact.

“When you delete something accidentally, time is of the essence. The longer you continue to use the computer, the more likely that you will overwrite the file. When that happens, it is gone.

“The average rookie might find the recovery process too difficult. If so, and the lost file is really important, take the machine to a computer shop. This probably won’t be cheap.

“However, the adventurous might want to try the recovery process themselves. In that case, there are a number of programs available. A few that get good reviews are R-Studio 2.0 (\$80); Active Undelete 5.1 (\$40); and Directory Snoop 5.0 (\$40). Get them at, respectively:

- www.r-studio.com/#rstudio
- www.active-undelete.com
- www.briggsoft.com

“If you have a utility program like Norton SystemWorks, you may already have what you need to get the job done.” □

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