# Safeguard Your Computer TODAY!

Just like humans, computers need check-ups too. And considering just how much computers affect our daily lives, we should be doing these check-ups frequently.

Viruses, spyware and spam, oh my! Here's a step-by-step guide to protecting your computer from those annoying pop-up ads and immunizing it from catastrophic virus attack.

Let's start with the anti-virus softwares. Viruses are the ever-feared bad guys of the computer world. Some are malicious and may crash systems or whole networks. Others are what appear to be fun and might reflect just a kid testing his or her programming/hacking abilities. The single best way to treat and stop viruses is to either purchase or download an anti-virus program.

My recommendation is Trend Micro's PC-cillin. The product is a combination of anti-virus, anti-spam and an Internet firewall. I recommend the program because at least once a day, the people over at Trend Micro are releasing an update to the virus definitions as well as the program in general. The cost of $50 for one year of updates is so worth it for preventing the hard drive freezes and system crashes. Occasionally, you can purchase this product for less with rebates when you "trade-in" another anti-virus program. I recommend PC-cillin also because it scans the computer for known security loopholes that hackers look for in order to browse through your personal files.
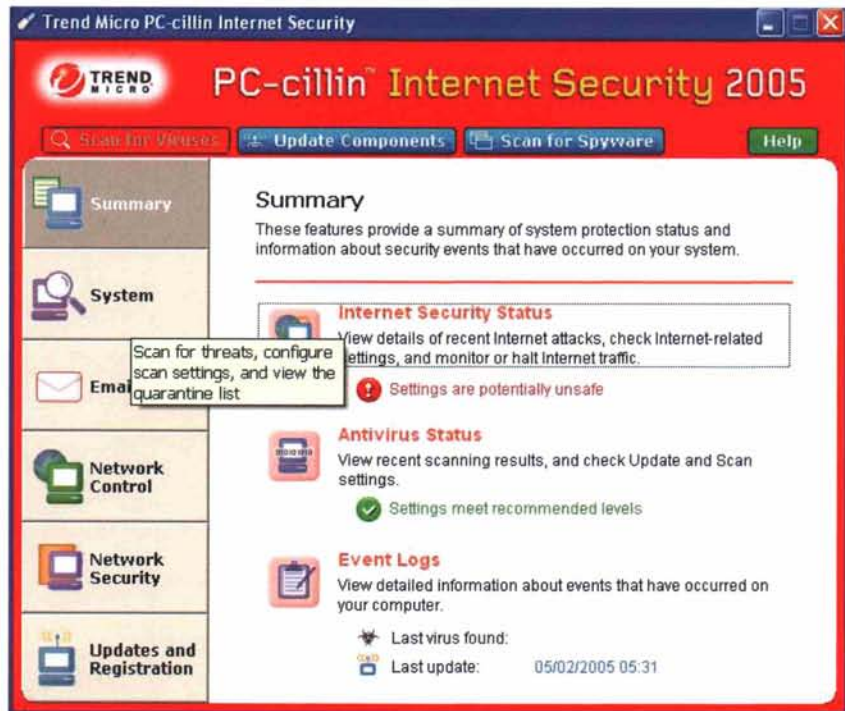
Other anti-virus programs that are available include the two most popular, McAfee and Norton. Both of these programs offer the full Internet security suite. In the past, I myself have had troubles with Norton and Windows XP

Service Pack 2. They have probably resolved that problem by now though.

Although Windows XP Service Pack 2 comes with a firewall, I strongly recommend having a suite of programs that includes the anti-virus **and** a firewall. Also, many people rely on the free anti-virus programs that come through some Internet service providers. Some of these programs have merit, but as the saying goes, sometimes you get what you pay for. The extra money invested is well worth the security of knowing that my computer is safe. My e-mail is scanned when it comes in and when it goes out, and nobody is getting into my user files!

Moving on, spyware and malware have become buzzwords on the Internet and their presence has become a major headache for many IT professionals. Basically, spyware/malware comprises little tiny programs that you yourself are unwittingly downloading as you surf the Internet and visit different Web sites. These programs send information as to when you are online and what Web sites you visit back to companies that can then send you advertisements that "pop up" on your computer. Sometimes these pop-up windows are from the Web sites that you are on, and sometimes they come from all the spy programs. Many different ways exist to take care of this problem; I'm going to outline how I have successfully defeated pop-ups and spyware. Following is a list of the programs that you need. I'll walk you through how to use them next.

Go to *http://www.download.com/* and search for Ad-Aware SE. The personal edition of this program is free and can be downloaded from the Web site. Download the latest version.

While at *http://www.download.com/* do a search for Spybot – Search and Destroy. Download and install Spybot – Search and Destroy in the latest version

You're not done yet . . . now you need to search for Spyware Blaster and download and install Spyware Blaster in the latest version.

Finally, visit *http://www.nsclean.com/dsostop.html* and download the program DSOSTOP2.exe. To eliminate confusion, choose the HTTP option. This will bring up the download box asking where to save it. I would recommend saving all of these on the desktop or in their own folder on the desktop.

First run the DSOSTOP2.exe program. This program blocks a known security loophole in Windows Internet Explorer that has not been fixed as of this writing. DSOStop2 works to prevent Web sites that use ActiveX, used by Microsoft for online updates of Internet Explorer and Windows, from maliciously downloading malware

Next, install Ad-Aware, Spybot and Spyware Blaster. The first two are the key components to searching for and removing spyware and malware. Spyware Blaster works with Spybot by protecting your Web browsers from bad Web sites and preventing unwanted software installations on your computer.

After installing these programs, run each of them, first choosing the update option in the main screens of each and then doing the search and cleaning options offered by Ad-Aware and Spybot. Spybot also offers the tab of immunize. Immunize your computer and then click on the link in the window to open Spyware Blaster. Update Spyware Blaster in the update tab and then in the protection tab

choose the quick task to enable all protection.
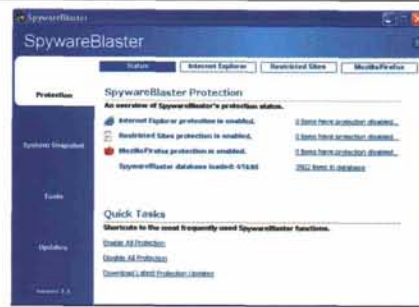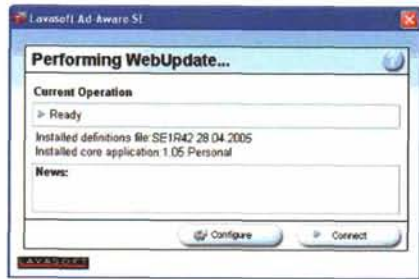
If you are like many people that I have helped out, you will quarantine and remove a lot of programs that you didn't even know were on your computer. Your computer, if like the other computers I've done this to, will start to run noticeably faster and smoother, especially when you are on the Internet.

We've taken care of half of the problem now. In a sense we've just cleansed the system, but we still need to prevent it from happening again. **Most of our spyware today is brought into the system through Internet Explorer and our friendly chat programs that are used to keep in touch with friends and family. Remove those programs and download Firefox.**

That's a simple instruction. Why don't people do it? First, chatting with friends is fun and a heck of a lot cheaper than a phone call. However these programs are full of security loopholes that are being exploited frequently, allowing back-door access to your personal computer files by persons with less-than-the-best of intentions. Some of the viruses that are making the news these days are installed onto computers using these very programs, such as AOL's Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, ICQ and Windows Messenger. If these programs are going to be used, be sure to run a virus check and spyware check on a more frequent basis, like two to three times per week.

As to the second half of my recommendation above, yes, changing Web browsers can be very daunting. There's a fear of changing Web browsers, especially switching to one that might take some getting used to. Firefox is the latest development from a spin-off of Netscape that uses open source code. This allows the browser users to develop plug-ins and exten-

sions for customized browsing and enhanced security.

Download Firefox at *http://www.getfirefox.com*. The program is free and worth every bit of time you invest in learning. Firefox has enhanced security, tabbed browsing, pop-up blocking and the extensions that let you tweak it into something even more useful.

Above is a screen shot of my Firefox browser. I can read one page while more are loading in the background. The benefit is that I'm only using one window instead of having three or more open with Internet Explorer. When I'm ready to switch to another tab, I just push Alt+Tab or click the other tab.
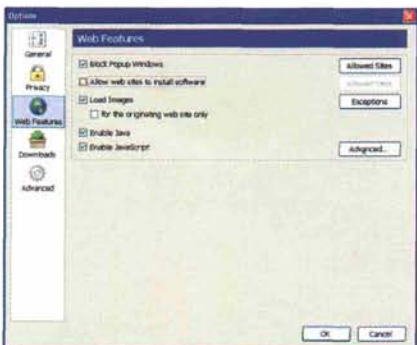
The feature that must be executed with Firefox is to uncheck the "Allow Web sites to install software" button in the Options under Tools Menu. However, if you want to install extensions, you will need to have the checkmark back in that box. I use the Adblock extension to stop the annoying ads on Web sites I frequent and the dictionary search extension to look up new and interesting words from Web pages.

Do you see the annoying ad in the middle of my news? I click the little button that says Adblock at the lower left-hand side of the image . . . and now it's gone after I click the OK. Firefox also blocked a pop-up ad from this Web site. I can allow the pop-up if I want it by simply clicking in the yellow area and following the directions.

I know that this sounds like a lot of work for a computer that might not get used all too much, but if you're on the Internet it's better to be safe than sorry. There are too many companies looking to push their ads onto your desktop and too many people looking to get private information out of you and your computer.
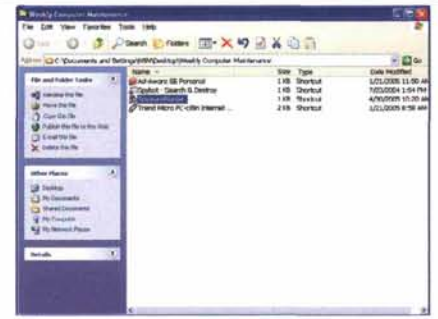
In closing, I suggest making a weekly maintenance folder that you open and execute on a certain day each week. I've got my three spyware programs and Trend Micro in mine. A little bit of discipline in doing this weekly will help stop those headaches from pop-ups, slow Web surfing and the fear that you might not know who is nosing around in your computer.