Bits & Bytes

Insider Tips On How To Use Technology To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, And More Profitably

Technical Action Group Inc

TAG

we're I.T.

"As a business owner , I know you don't have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That's where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems forever."

Joe Stoll, President
Technical Action Group (TAG)
JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com

Inside this issue:

Do You Have Ghosts & Goblins In Your Computers?

7 Warning Signs That Your Computer Is Infected With Spyware

Spyware is NOT harmless; it can be responsible for delivering a mountain of annoying spam, taking over your web browser, slowing down your PC, and serving up "sticky" pop-up ads. In some of the more extreme cases, spyware can actually steal your passwords, financial information, e-mail address book, and even use your PC for illegal activities.

Most spyware programs are designed to run undetected by the user, but there are warning signs like…

#1. Your browser has been hijacked. If you open your Internet browser and a strange looking homepage pops up and won't go away, chances are you have a spyware program installed on your computer. You may also discover that you cannot modify your browser settings and that your favourites folder has been modified.

#2. You conduct a search, but another (unauthorized) browser completes it for you. For example, you type a search term into Microsoft IE, but another browser pops up and lists various web sites tied to your search term. This is a surefire sign of a spyware infection. You'll also notice that if you try to remove this program, it comes right back.

#3. Your computer is unstable, sluggish, locks up, or crashes frequently. Spyware programs run in the background taking up disk space and processor speed which will cause serious performance problems.

#4. You constantly get pop-up ads displayed on your screen, even if you aren't browsing the Internet. Some of the ads may even be personalized with your name.
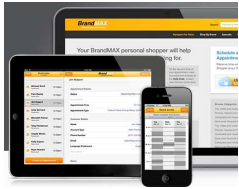
#5. The send and receive lights on your modem blink actively as though you are surfing the Internet or downloading files online, even though you aren't. More than likely this is due to spyware programs sending and receiving information via your computer without your permission or knowledge.

#6. Mysterious files suddenly start appearing on your computer, your files are moved or deleted, or the icons on your desktop and toolbars are blank or missing.

#7. You find e-mails in your "Sent Items" folder that you didn't send.

If you are experiencing one or more of these warning signs, chances are your computer is infected so you'll want to call us immediately to clean it up. If you are fortunate enough to have a clean bill of health, you'll still want to get a copy of our **FREE Report**:

FREE: "How To Keep Your Computer Safe From Crippling Pop-ups, Viruses, Spyware, & Spam, While Avoiding Expensive Computer Repair Bills"

To claim your **FREE** Report go to http://www.technicalactiongroup.com/guides/
Don't delay. Get the report today...and be worry-free from those computer ghosts and goblins in no time flat!

How Long Would It Really Take To Crack Your "Strong" Password?

How many @'s, %'s and other crazy symbols are in your password right now? Are they really all that necessary? According to a recent Carnegie Mellon study, the answer is no. The only thing that really influences your password strength is its length! Not whether it has X minimum characters or Y maximum characters. And not whether it has a kazillion combinations of numbers, letters and other doodads that are bound to confuse most of your employees and be impossible to remember.

Regular Password Changes Decrease Security

In the recent past, regularly scheduled password changes were a common friend of network security. However, with most computer users now requiring upwards of 20-30 passwords between work and home, this whole password security game has gotten a bit out of control. When pressed to change their password regularly, your poor employees start to use "sucky" passwords pretty quickly because they need something that is easy to remember. Or just as bad, they create a good password and then write it on a sticky note to put on their computer monitor so they don't forget!

How To Choose A Strong Password

You want to choose a password that is hard for anyone to guess. Ideally you would want to use a lengthy string of letters, numbers and odd characters AND still be able to remember it easily. One way to do this is by creating a random phrase and using the first letter of every word, substituting +'s or &'s for the word "and" or numbers like 4 for the word "for" (or any similar tricks that are easy for you to remember). As an example, the phrase "I love my computer guys and they are the best company for me!" would translate to a password of "ilmcg+trtbc4m." That's easy to remember and almost impossible to crack. In fact, you can test out your password at http://passfault.appspot.com/password_strength.html to see just how strong it really is. The password we created above would take 1,306,628,104 centuries to crack…. Now that's a strong password!

How To Choose A Strong Password

Even if you have a strong password, you should never use the same password on different websites. Your online banking password should be different than Facebook, which should be different than Gmail, which should be different than your network password at work. A quick and easy way to remember all of these unique strong passwords is to use a "Password Management Solution." A few of the most popular tools you can test out are KeePass, RoboForm and AnyPassword. These tools allow you to securely keep track of all of your passwords while remembering only one.

Attention All Businesses Processing, Storing Or Handling Credit Cards
What You Need To Know About PCI Compliance

PCI Compliance is shorthand for Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), and it is a set of legal requirements for any business that processes, stores or accepts credit card payments, even if they use a third-party processor. PCI was designed with one goal in mind: to prevent credit card fraud and identity theft. To that end, there are 12 compliance requirements and all must be implemented for a merchant to be certified as compliant.

Who's Behind It?

The Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council (PCI SSC) was launched on September 7, 2006 to manage the ongoing evolution of the Payment Card Industry (PCI) security standards. The PCI DSS is administered and managed by the PCI SSC (www.pcisecuritystandards.org), an independent body that was created by the major payment card brands (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover and JCB).

What Are The Requirements To Comply?

Most of the 12 requirements are just common sense. For example, you never want to store your customers' credit card numbers in an unsecured media, like tape backups, and you want to use good, strong passwords for important web portals and system access.

Other parts of the compliance regulations are IT security measures you should have in place anyway, such as up-to-date firewalls, security patch management, encrypting cardholder data transmission, developing an in-house security policy and restricting access to your processing network. If IT security is not your core focus, then you probably want to bring in a team of pros (us!) to determine if you truly are meeting the compliance standards and to manage your network to ensure security stays updated.

How Do You Know If You're Compliant?

A full list of the requirements, along with a self-assessment, can be found on this web site: www.pcisecuritystandards.org. But if you want to be certain, give us a call for a FREE Security Audit so we can look at your computer network and systems to see where your weaknesses lie. Even if the PCI security requirements weren't mandated by law, these are the kind of guidelines you would want to adopt anyway to ensure the security of your processing system and your customers' data.

Restart! Restart! Restart!

We've had an onslaught of calls to the Help Desk lately for a myriad of issues reported by users that were easily resolved with a simple restart of the computer. So I thought this a good time to harp as I did a few issues back….and you'll want to do the same with your staff.

Leaving a computer on for weeks at a time without a restart, taxes the computer and makes it very sluggish and temperamental. Think of how you would perform at work after a couple of weeks without sleep to recharge your batteries.

Doing a restart on all of your office PCs at the end of each work day is one of the best technical habits to get into. It doesn't take long (you hit "restart" and walk away) and this simple act can save A LOT of frustration, computer support costs, and slow productivity.

Blackberry Tips
Secret Shortcuts

…with which every BlackBerry device user should be familiar:

Insert a Period
Press spacebar twice.

Type An Accent Or Special Character
Hold the appropriate letter key and then roll the track-ball/pad for options.

Capitalize a Letter
Hold the letter key until the capitalized version appears.

Change An Option Field
Hold down the **ALT** key and roll the trackpad/ball.

Find Contacts From The Home Screen
Press the letter key for the contact's first and last initials, with a space between them (e.g., Bob Smith = B [space] S

Switch Programs
Hold down the **BB button** until programs appear; toggle to select.

Reply To A Message
Press R

Reply To All
Press L

Forward Message
Press F

View Contact's E-Mail Address:
Highlight the contact and press Q

Toys 'R' Us Introduces Tablet For Kids

Yup—it's happened. As computing continues to move towards mobile, why not introduce kids to it at an early age? Later this fall, Toys R Us will be selling the Tabeo 7" Android tablet designed for use by children.

Your kids have probably figured out your iPad (and maybe even taught you some functionality) but now they can have their very own tablet to smudge up with peanut butter.

While the Tabeo doesn't have huge specs compared to adult tablets, it's enough for its target users. It has a 800x470 7" display with WiFi support, a front camera, speakers and a microphone. 1GB of RAM and 4GB of internal storage.

At around $150 (US pricing), it will boast 7,000+ free games, books, and educational programs at its own Tabeo App store. It comes preloaded with 50+ top apps including Angry Birds and Cut the Rope. Parental controls ensure safety and security for its tender aged users. You're welcome for the early Christmas gift idea... :-)

Three Google Search Alternatives That Don't Invade Your Privacy

Did you know that every time you perform a search on the Internet, you're being tracked? All of the big companies do this. Google is the most notorious, but Bing, Yahoo and AOL are all equally involved. Try out the below alternatives so you're not tracked.

Tracking information collected about you is used to build back-end user profiles. These profiles weren't initially designed for anything malicious, just to sell you customized search results and ads. But, what is done with this information has become increasingly ambiguous.

Are you concerned enough about your privacy to make a change in which search provider you use? Below are three alternatives to Google and Bing that don't harvest anything about you. When you use one of these search engines, they act as a proxy between you, the source engine, and the website that it takes you to. Overall, your privacy is protected at the small expense of missing out only a few features you might otherwise have had. Each pro-privacy search engine guarantees the following:

- SSL Encrypted Searches (can be disabled in user preferences)
- IP address not recorded
- No tracking or identifying cookies
- No searches or activity stored

START PAGE

Start page is a privacy minded search engine that uses Google to pull in results. But, rather than Google receiving your IP, search terms, and placing tracking cookies on you, Start page acts as an information laundering middle-man. By default SSL is enabled, so searches might seem a bit slow. Javascript is also disabled and several Google search functions will not work through Start Page. However, if anonymous Google search results are what you want, Start Page delivers.

IXQUICK

If you'd prefer results from multiple search engines, Ixquick provides them. Being the same company that runs Start Page, don't expect things to be much different from an interface perspective. Ixquick doesn't exactly show you which search engines it uses to pull results, but Google and Bing are among them. Ixquick is also designed to pull localized results dependent upon which language you use to search.

DUCK DUCK GO

Duck Duck Go is probably the most feature rich of the privacy-oriented search engine. Like Ixquick, Duck Duck Go pulls results from other search engines. But unfortunately, Google is not one of them. Instead, results from Duck Duck Go are more likely to feel like you are searching Bing. Duck Duck Go also has the most simple interface, and performance on it doesn't lag behind as much as its Ixquick contenders.

Overall each search engine provides a good alternative. While it's true, your bank and credit card company know much more about you, does everyone else on the web need to also? Many don't think so, and Ixquick recently announced that over 2 million searches are performed through it's network of sites on a daily basis.