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## Columnist

# Spyware & Virus Prevention for Windows PC's

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The Internet can be a dangerous place. Most of us at one point in time have had one form of a virus or spyware infection on our desktop PC. For those who have children surfing the web, the odds of acquiring an infection on your computer rise significantly. If you are not an experienced technical person, it can be very time consuming and expensive to rid a computer of a malicious infection.

I take a different approach to viruses and spyware that may be able to help you, especially if you are in a household where there is only one computer — but multiple users. The objective is to prevent the infection in the first place. In many cases, simply installing an anti-viral program is not enough. Often these programs cannot detect infections, leaving you to wonder what just happened.

Here are a few steps you can take to tighten up the security on your home or business computer:

1. Install a virus/spyware protection program on your computer –

even though these programs may not always detect malicious activity on your computer, it doesn't mean you shouldn't use one. Any defense is better than no defense. There are many free products out there available for download, such as Microsoft's Security Essentials, or Avast Antivirus. If you prefer to purchase one, Kaspersky 2010 and Eset Smart Security are respectable products.

2. User Permissions and Profiles – It is good practice to set up user accounts for each person who uses the desktop PC. User accounts give you the ability to assign permissions to the accounts, which lets you prevent users from installing programs on the PC without your knowledge. Viruses and Spyware are programs that need to be installed just like most other legitimate programs. By taking away the user's ability to install programs, you can prevent many infections from happening in the first place. I recommend setting up a separate account with administrator rights just for installing software and having an account for all other users with restricted user permis-

sions. It is also important to make sure that the default system Administrator Account has a password assigned to it and that it is not left blank. If you want to learn more about user accounts, read these articles from Microsoft. Windows XP User Accounts: [www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/setup/winxp/accounts.msp](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/setup/winxp/accounts.msp) Windows Vista/7 User Accounts: [technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ee623984\(W.S.10\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ee623984(W.S.10).aspx)

3. Safe Surfing – Practicing safe surfing techniques can cut down on the chances of getting a Spyware or Virus infection.

- Always pay attention to the pop-up windows, read the text. It is often too easy to unintentionally say "yes" to something when you have no idea what you are saying yes to. You could be installing a virus. If you don't understand the question in the box, just click the red "X" on the title bar to close the window.
- Beware of free software. There is a lot of really good free software out there, but there is also a lot of really bad free software too. Before you download and install anything, do

some research and make sure you are installing a reputable product.

- Email attachments are also a source of problems. Most legitimate email systems and companies do not send attachments in email messages. If you are unsure of the sender, just delete the message. Never open an attachment if you are not sure, plain and simple.

4. Teach the kids – If you are in a household with children, it is important that they understand the basics of computer safety. While it is true that many kids understand how to use a computer better than their parents, they might not understand computer safety or grasp what is involved in fixing an infected PC. Teach your children the safe fundamentals outlined in the previous section and pay attention to what they are doing online. If you find yourself needing more protection for the kids, install an internet filtering product such as Net Nanny ([www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com))

If you find yourself in need of some more help, contact a local expert.