

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

December 2009
Don Hood, President

Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

Highlands Crossing Center, 1801 Forest Hills Blvd, Suite 120 Bella Vista, AR 72715-3016

Web site: www.bvcompclub.org

E-mail: jrc@bvcc.arcoxml.com

The Club holds an Open House Help Clinic on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of every month. These provide you with the opportunity to get answers to questions and, hopefully, resolve computer related problems. To reduce the possibility of having to use this service here are some issues you can review.

Not using a good surge protector can expose your computer to surges on the electrical line that could destroy your computer. The higher the joule rating the greater the protection. Read the literature, know what the lights mean, and make sure it's working properly. Don't forget to take advantage of the TV cable and telephone line protection. This can help but is no guarantee that you won't lose your cable or DSL modem during severe thunderstorms. Turning off the surge protector is not necessarily a solution. Your computer will love you if you connect it to an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS).

Not updating the antivirus data base every time you start your computer reduces the effectiveness of the program. Know how to verify that the update has been obtained. Make sure you're using the latest version of the program. If available, have the program use heuristic scanning. Remember, only one antivirus program. That means the trial version program that was installed on your new computer needs to be uninstalled if you decide to use a different program.

If you're using Windows XP, Windows Vista, or Windows 7, make sure the firewall is turned on.

Use several malware detection and removal programs. Update the program before you have it scan your computer and let it remove anything it detects. If you're using multiple programs that have an active monitoring feature, decide which active monitoring you want to use and disable the active monitoring feature in the remaining programs. This is an area that requires special attention. Run these programs two or three times each month.

Make sure you're getting the monthly updates from Microsoft. It's absolutely essential that you get the high priority/important updates, but don't ignore the optional/recommended updates. Even though you have the program configured to automatically install updates it's a good idea to go to Microsoft and manually check to make sure you've received everything you need.

Develop a maintenance program that utilizes the programs included in the operating system to remove unnecessary programs and information from your computer and optimize its performance.

There are security settings that are part of the operating system, Internet Explorer, and Outlook Express/Windows Mail. You need to know where to find these settings and make sure they're providing maximum protection without interfering with functionality.

Basic computer knowledge and common sense can keep your computer running good and keep you safe from situations that can put you and your computer in jeopardy.

With the holiday season just around the corner, think about this. Have you had company, usually relatives, use your computer while they were visiting? When they left did your computer look different, work different, and have unknown program installed? Here's a way to eliminate or at least reduce the magnitude of this happening to you again. Password all of the accounts you have on your computer. Turn on the Guest account. When someone asks if they can use your computer say, "Yes, use the Guest account". They will have access to the Internet, be able to use the programs on the computer, but will not be allowed to install/uninstall programs or make changes to the computer that would affect other users.

PC Magazine partnered with AV-Test.org of Germany to evaluate six free antivirus programs. The program that came in number one was Avira AntiVir Personal. While the program achieved top scores in five of the six areas tested, it is not the most user friendly program. One point behind AntiVir was Alwil Avast Antivirus Home Edition. While the program's interface was considered outdated, it's more user friendly with good features. AVG 8.5 Free took third place. While it was rated very good overall, malware blocking was below average. The remaining programs included in the testing in their order of finish included Microsoft Security Essentials, PC Tools Antivirus Free Edition, and Comodo Internet Security.

For those of you purchasing new computers, here are some issues you need to address. Most new computers are loaded with promotions and programs you might not be interested in using. If that's the case, uninstall the things you don't want. Also, programs like Microsoft Office Home and Student Edition and antivirus (usually Norton or McAfee) are trial versions. If you want to use these programs you'll have to purchase them. Here is a critical issue. It appears Dell is the only company that includes a recovery/restore disc. The other companies have included a program on the hard drive that allows you to create discs that you can use to restore your computer to its original condition if you have a catastrophic malfunction. To do this you'll need two or three DVDs and the process will take almost an hour. Some companies might give you the option to create other types of discs that could be used for troubleshooting and repair. Whatever they offer, be sure to take the time to make these discs shortly after getting your computer up and running.

=====

Just a reminder, the January meeting will be the first question and answer session of the New Year. Start writing down the questions you would like to have the panel of experts answer.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probably be a wait. We now have three work stations for members and one for nonmembers.