

# Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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## Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

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Who's your Internet service provider? Is it dial-up or high speed? How much are you paying for Internet service? If you watch very much television you've probably seen the NetZero add that talks about how much cable or DSL users could save by switching to NetZero for just \$9.95 per month. OK high speed Internet users, how much would you need to save each month to get you to switch back to a dial-up connection? Here are some dial-up options - NetZero for \$9.95, PeoplePC for \$10.95, Juno for \$9.95, and Arkansas.Net for \$20.00. Here are some basic high speed Internet options - AT&T Basic for \$19.95 and Cox Starter for \$21.99. As you can see you could save about \$10 per month if you switched from high speed Internet to dial-up. What's the tradeoff, slow download speed resulting in a lot of waiting when reading e-mail and surfing the Web and extremely long download times.

In theory a 56K dial-up modem can download 7,000 bytes of information per second. The \$19.95 AT&T Basic service can download up to approximately 98,034 bytes per second. The \$21.99 Cox Starter service can download up to approximately 131,072 bytes per second. How does this difference in download speed translate to the amount of time it takes to download something from the Internet? Let's say you want to download the free version of Avast antivirus. The size of the download is 41.53MB (41,530,000 bytes). With the dial-up connection it will take approximately ninety nine minutes to download. With the AT&T Basic connection it will take approximately seven minutes. With the Cox Starter connection it will take approximately five and one quarter minutes. It becomes obvious that a dial-up connection is not appropriate for the things most computer users want to do in the Internet.

When discussing high speed Internet accounts, here is another issue to consider. AT&T and Cox offer several different plans. Each plan is based on download speed and the price increases as the download speed increases. AT&T has their Internet Basic special for \$19.95 (up to 768Kbps), Express for \$25 (up to 1.5Mbps), Pro for \$30 (up to 3Mbps), and Elite for \$35 (up to 6Mbps). Cox has their Starter for \$21.99 (up to 1Mbps), Essential for \$29.99 (up to 3Mbps), Preferred for \$46.99 (up to 12Mbps), and Premier for \$61.99 (up to 25Mbps). These companies would probably like for you to sign up for the service that provides the fastest download speed. But, before you do that you need to be aware that there are a lot of web sites that can't feed the information to you at the speed of your Internet connection. You would probably be satisfied with the basic account from either of these providers if you all you do is e-mail and research on the Web. Let's use Cox and compare the download times between the Starter and Essential accounts. Downloading Avast using the Starter account would take 5.28 minutes compared to 1.76 minutes on the Essential account. Is it worth spending an extra \$8 per month

to save three and one half minutes on that download? Would it be worth spending an extra \$12.04 per month to save an hour and a half when download a program like Avast using a dial-up connection?

Excerpts from an article by Paul Buckner worth revisiting. You have undoubtedly heard of Spyware by now, and probably have Spybot Search and Destroy or Ad-Aware installed to help deal with the threat(s) it poses. According to F-Secure, Spyware is defined as: Software that performs actions such as creating unsolicited pop-ups, hijacks home/search pages, or redirects browsing results.

Although that definition is correct, the lines between Spyware, adware, viruses and Trojans are blurring badly. Many who wrote viruses have found employment using their skills to write Spyware programs. As you have probably heard by now, Spyware often times comes packaged with free software in the hopes that you will download the potentially fun or helpful program, and unknowingly infect your computer. This kind of software is usually advertised by pop-up ad or banner ad on a website, or by spam, etc.

Recently, Spyware writers have begun using Trojan and worm software to compromise your computer. This is where the lines blur, because these aren't tactics traditionally used by Spyware. This 'strain' uses flaws in Microsoft Windows (like many viruses) to get into your computer, along with pop-up ads, etc. Once your machine is infected, it will slow down and you will receive many, many more pop-ups, some of them impersonating real alerts from Microsoft Windows.

These pop-ups in turn often advertise software that will supposedly remove Spyware, viruses, and speed up your computer or clean your registry, all for a fee. Once you have downloaded and installed the software, the Spyware infection may or may not be removed, but many of the pop-ups remain. The horrible fact is, you have actually paid to have the Spyware removed by the people who put it there in the first place.

These programs are weak pretenders bent on infecting your machine and then blackmailing you into having the infection removed. It is no different than someone stealing something from you and then selling it back. Unfortunately, in many cases the infection is either not removed, or in fact replaced by other Spyware. People often pay between \$20.00 and \$60.00 to these charlatans.

So, in conclusion, if you are receiving any of these symptoms, be aware that fraud may be at your doorstep, and quickly move to eliminate these pop-ups with antispyware programs such as Ad-Aware, or Spybot. If you are already well in their grasp, you may need to resort to outside help, but I hope that this article serves as warning of a change in how Spyware programmers are targeting unsuspecting PC users.

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An excellent free spyware detection and removal program that has been developed since the above article was written is Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware.

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.