

President's Corner: November, 2014
Know What You are Installing on Your Computer
By Eric Moore

Last month, Bob Gostischa gave a guest presentation for CUGG on the topic of securing your computer and recommended software to install. It was an informative and useful presentation overall, which most of our attendees evidently enjoyed. I plan to check out a number of the programs that he recommended.

One of our long-time members, Ron Mettler followed up last week with his own thoughts about the software mentioned in Bob's presentation. Ron made some good points that are worth considering (as well as sharing some of his recommendations):

Memory-resident Programs: Any program that loads when Windows starts and is always running is by definition a *memory-resident program*. Such programs may be useful and even necessary. A number of programs called *processes* are loaded by Windows at boot-time and remain running constantly, serving the needs of the user and the operating system. Some may be installed by the user to perform additional, specialized functions. A prime example is an anti-virus program such as Norton AntiVirus, McAfee, Avast!, and AVG AntiVirus. By always running in the background, an anti-virus program is better able to detect and stop any malware before it takes control of the computer, destroys data, or steals the user's personal information. Because memory-resident programs use up memory and processor time, they do slow the computer down a bit. This is a reason why you are advised not to install two memory-resident anti-virus programs—they can significantly slow your computer and could conflict with each other, causing stability issues with Windows.

I do want to note that multiple anti-virus programs can be installed on the same computer without issues, as long as only one is a memory-resident program. A good example of one that is not memory-resident is the free version Malwarebytes Anti-Malware. It only runs when you open it. As such, it can be a useful tool to check your system which may otherwise be protected with a memory-resident program such as Norton AntiVirus. I sometimes use it at home and at work to get a “second opinion” about a suspected malware infection.

Driver Update Programs: Some third-part programs are designed to check your computer's hardware drivers and download and install new versions when they are released. Ron recommends against such programs, as not all drivers updates are required. Windows Update has the ability to check for driver updates and mark any that are recommended, as they fix known hardware issues. I also refrain from spending the time to download and install an updated driver, unless I know it is necessary.

I should also add that you don't require a third-party program to check for driver updates—they are available from the manufacturer's website. If your computer is made by a company such as Dell, HP, or Apple, you will find driver updates on their websites. If you purchased and added a hardware device such as a sound card, graphics card, or DVD drive, you can find driver updates on the website of the device's manufacturer. I do not recommend installing drivers that are hosted on non-manufacturer websites, as they could contain malicious software. (The same applies to software updates—always go to the manufacturer's website, not a third-party site.) Any documentation that comes with your computer and devices should include the addresses of their websites, where you can safely search for and download driver updates.

Tag-along Programs: More and more, you will find that many programs that you download to install

will come bundled with other unrelated, third-party software. Such software is not only unnecessary, but could be malicious, waste of disk space, and slow down your computer. When installing software, be careful to read every prompt before proceeding. If you see an option to install something else that you were not intending to install, then be certain to uncheck the option to install it. Also be careful of website links that may mislead you to download and install something completely different than what you want, or which have options that will automatically install additional software and change your program settings. (A prime example of this is the Flash Player updates on Adobe's site. If you are not watchful, you may end up installing Google Chrome and letting it take over as your default web browser.)

Conclusion

As a final note, be certain to research a new program before installing it. Sites such as PC Magazine and PC World review software and give their recommendations as to what is worthwhile and what is not. Also, CUGG is composed of members who have had years or even decades of computing experience and are willing to serve as resources of information if you have questions or need advice. No question is a “dumb” question, so please speak up if you wish to know whether someone has had experience with a particular program and can provide advice on whether it is safe and worthwhile to install. Just by asking, it is an opportunity for you and other members to learn something new.