Beckett PC Solutions Newsletter, February 2019
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How to Spot Scams

Scams which appear regularly and in many forms. Cold calls are the most common. Some will say they are from Microsoft, that you have viruses on your computer, and they can fix it for you.   They can be very insistent. They might also say they are from Windows, which of course, is not a company at all.   Bottom line is that neither of these companies will call you unless you call them first. Some of my clients have paid them, while one of my clients was robbed of $4500. Hang up! Call me if you have concerns.

Sometimes a scam takes the form of a small popup on the lower right of your Windows desktop. Ads appear here all the time; do not click on them.   You might even receive email messages.   Many of these are filtered into the SPAM box, but some get through. Unless you have requested a link, don't click on anything.   It may look like your bank but don't click on the link. You will be able to tell it is a scam by hovering over the link and looking at the URL that appears.   It is likely not the real website for your bank or other service. Go to your browser and log on to your account if you have concerns.

Another common scam is a page that takes over the home page of your browser and won't let you close the page. Try shutting down the computer right away. This might fix the problem. If it doesn't, your browser will need to be reset to turn off the background applications. Some of these applications will not let you get into settings to do a reset. Many of the browsers will let you start the browser in safe mode (no background programs will run) if you hold the Shift button when you start the program. Then you can go into settings and reset the browser.

When in doubt, please call me.

Windows 10

Many of you are now using Windows 10 and if you have been with me a while, you are also using ClassicShell.net as your start menu for Windows 10. The menu looks a lot like the Windows 7

menu and for many, is easier to use than the Windows 10 menu. The start button can be fixed with ClassicShell.net, a simple download and install. The Gadgets, icons on the right that show a clock and calendar, sometimes weather info, can also be added back though they use a lot of RAM. During Windows updates you might be asked if it is OK to fix ClassicShell and/or 8Gadgits and you should click yes to these questions.

Updates are a necessary evil. They happen often and people that leave their computers on all day may not notice they are happening. Most of the calls I get are related to updates.

"My screen went blank for a long time, I think my computer died."

"My computer is frozen"

"My computer is really slow and I am not doing anything"

Updates will usually show up during the boot up process if you watch the computer boot up, also when you restart or shutdown the computer. You can check to see the status of an update by doing the following steps:

1. Click the Start button
2. Type Updates and Security
3. Select the Windows Updates Settings or Check for Updates
4. Check Windows updates should be at the top of the window with a button to Check for Updates
5. If there is no button, you may see that updates are in process.

Some updates can take hours to complete. Some might show an error. The general rules is to let them run their course over several days before you intervene. Leave the computer on for the day, restart the computer if there is an error. Shut down and restart a computer at least once each day because most updates require a restart to complete. Be patient, it will save you much grief in the long run.

Passwords

Passwords are a necessary evil in our world today. Passwords are required for your email and for your bank, Social Security, or car insurance. Many require special formats, upper case, lower case, numbers and some with special characters (!@#$...). Most understand the need for passwords but then how do you remember them all? You can make your password the same for everything if it follows the required rules for each site, but there is a danger if it is cracked, then all your accounts are accessible. I have some clients that keep a paper log of their passwords, others that have a Word file on their computer with all their passwords. These methods can be compromise your security.

I use a program to track all my passwords, secret codes and PIN numbers that is free to download and has a great structure for organizing types of passwords. I added a feature so that the data file (encrypted and secure) is in my DropBox account so I have access to it from any of my computers or my phone. This came in very handy when I needed a password while I was in Europe last year. So the program I use is **KeePass** (http://keepass.info/). Go to this link, click on the most current application for your computer to download it. Start the install and then run the program. Create a file name for your KeePass file and save it to the location that is best for you, creating a password to access this file (the only password you will need to remember without writing it down). Click on the Network tab and enter all your wireless and modem passwords. Then click on the eMail tab and enter all of your email account passwords. After this click on Homebanking and enter all your financial institution accounts and passwords. Click the save icon and you are done. Just remember, any time you change your password, open this program up and edit the selection to reflect this change. Dual verification systems are best where there is a secondary verification sent to your cell phone or to email. Once the device has gone through this process, it is usually remembered and only need to enter your password. You need to change your passwords at least once each year to stay safe and protect your identity.

AVG, 2019 (now just AVG Free)

AVG seems to be sending out many new releases for the free version this year. It is okay to install this but be careful to select Basic and not the Trial version when starting the install. Many are inclined to select the column that has all the green check marks thinking it is better, and the trial will ask you to pay in a month or so. If you have already downloaded the trial and are being prompted to pay, go to the Control Panel and uninstall the trial version and click the button to click to keep the Free version. AVG is also now offering other products to download and install. I don't recommend installing these because they're more complicated and/or confusing but PCTools is the best of these. I do use two other products for cleanup, CCleaner and MalwareBytes. CCleaner seems to do the best job at removing temp files in all your browsers and cleaning up the registry. All have free versions.

Computer Costs still low

Computer costs continue to be low. New laptops with Windows 10, 8 gig of RAM and webcams in the bezel of the display, can be found under $350. New desktop computers are frequently on sale at Frys and Best Buy for the same price. If I do the setup in my office, the cost for the setup with data transfer is $120. I include the purchasing and picking up the computer with that price and can usually turn this around within 48 hours. LCD flat panel displays at 19" and 23" are less than $100, 27" are around $150.

If you want a higher quality laptop, I would recommend going with an Intel processor i-5 to i-7 and at least 6gig of RAM if not 8gig or 12gig. Optical drive are not usually included anymore since

most applications are downloaded and movies are streamed. It is worth finding laptops with SSD (solid state harddrives), because they are four times faster than conventional hard drives and manage shock much better. The SSD is usually smaller capacity but don't let this put you off. Check the current hard disk space you are using, likely it will be less. Some computers come with two drives, and SSD and conventional hard drive. In this case the conventional drive is usually 1TB. The cost for these laptops are usually in the range of $700 to $1200.

Upgrade your hard drive to speed up the computer

The cost of SSD have dropped in the last two years. As a result, I have been doing many upgrades of older computer to SSD drives. The total cost for just the upgrade is usually under $140 for a 500gig drive and under $210 for a 1TB hard drive, including parts and labor. Usually clients want me to do a standard clean up of the computer while I have it which adds just $60. The upgrade transfers all the information, including programs (applications) so everything looks the same but is four times faster. I have done many of these in the last year and it makes a big difference to my clients. It takes me about two days to get the SSD and then my work takes 24 hours to do the transplant. I can do these on laptops or desktops.

Log-Me-In

Most of my customers still prefer having me access and work on their computers remotely when issues come up. I find that about 40% of my time is now remote access work. This benefits the customer since it is my lowest hourly rate ($60) and it also gets the customer up and running in a very short period of time.   Please don't hesitate to use this tool to be sure you don't get into deeper trouble. You may receive a notice to pay for LogMeIn but you can ignore this notice. I have purchased an annual contract with LogMeIn to continue to allow me to work on your computer remotely.   To save all of us money, I have changed the procedure for using LogMeIn.   If you need me to connect and LogMeIn isn't running, you simply need to contact me, by phone or email. I will send a message from LogMeIn with a link that you will click on to install a temporary version of LogMeIn.   This will be followed up by a personal message from me with the code needed to activate your install.   Once activated, I will be able to use LogMeIn for 24 hours to correct problems with your computer. Each remote access will now include a 15% fee added to the hourly rate for labor, because they have increased the annual cost I pay for the LogMeIn service.

In Closing

Much of my business is tuning up computers including adding RAM and SSD hard drives. I haven't needed to build a computer in a long time, since it is more economical to buy new or surplus computers and upgrade them. If you have specific needs, I do still offer new builds. Remember, clean out those dead files using Disk Cleanup and CCleaner (https://www.piriform.com/ccleaner/download) , and backup your data files. Upgrade your AVG

Free or contact me to do it for you. Every quarter, run CCleaner and Malwarebytes. Also run the once-a-year free PCTools from AVG, use the one step option, then uninstall the application after, so you won't be reminded frequently to purchase it.

Thanks for reading. Please let me know if you have any questions. If you find this information helpful, please forward this email to friends and family.