

Beckett PC Solutions Newsletter, March 2023

Celebrating over 20 years in business!

In this issue

- **Renewed computers available**
- **Scams, Phishing, Ransomware and more**
- **2-step Verification**
- **Improvements to your computer experience**
- **Windows 11**
- **Antivirus**
- **Hard drive upgrade to solid state**
- **In Closing**

Renewed computers available

I have a wide variety of reasonably priced computer systems available, Win 10 and Linux, laptops, AIO, and desktop with displays. All have solid state hard drives and so are faster than the original computers. If you are interested, try them out and see if they are right for you. Perfect for kids and great for anyone that needs a computer or backup computer. They have base applications for word processing, spreadsheets and all the standard Windows or Linux applications. Contact me for details.

Scams, Phishing, Ransomware and more

Look before you click; that is my most important advice. Just receiving the email will not be an issue, but replying or clicking on a link in the email can be a world of trouble. Most importantly, if you don't have a connection with the company seemingly sending the message, it is likely just phishing. Beware, the logos and messages that seem like they are related to your accounts with that company should be suspect. First see who sent the message. Many times it will be from a personal email account like name@gmail.com, that would not be coming from a company. If you see name@companyname.ru this is from someone in Russia. If the from address looks like it might actually be related to the company name but you don't usually get messages from the company, open a browser and go to their web site, log on to your account and see if there are messages there for you. You can hover over the link and see what address will open if you were to click on the link. False messages will not have the company name in the web address.

I was recently notified that an Instagram message was received by a client with my picture on the message and an email address with my name using google but a long number after the name. Clearly not one of my email addresses. The other clue that it was not me was the message:

“Hi!

How are you doing today?”

Almost any message that begins with Hi, is likely false. Closer inspection showed that this was a new Instagram member with no followers and no other posts, so a brand new account with no activity, just my picture which is available on my web site. The best action is not to reply to the message. You can report them and the account will be shut down. Or you can just delete the message and move on.

Microsoft will never contact you unless you contact them first, 99% of the time, this is a scam. The warning message that pops up on your screen saying “your computer has been infected, don’t turn off your computer, just call this 800 number.” What do you think you should do? Turn off your computer and the message will vanish when it boots up. A surprising number of my clients do call the phone number and regret having done so. If you get a call and you did not contact them first, hang up or don’t answer. Most of us now will not answer the phone unless they recognise the name on caller ID. City names are almost always a solicitation. This is a good use of voice mail. If I don’t answer a call and they don’t leave voice mail, I assume it was not a legitimate phone call. If clients call and there is no name on my caller ID, I will add that name so it comes up the next time they call.

If you have doubts about a message, please feel free to call, I am happy to go over it with you. It is very easy for me to look at it if we have Zoho (my remote access service) installed but I can also talk you through it over the phone. If your bank calls, get a reference number, hang up, then use the number on your statement to call back. Use the reference number to find out why they are calling. I hope this helps you stay out of trouble, good luck!

2-step Verification

Many of my clients have now added 2-step verification to their accounts. Be sure it is associated with a cell phone for text messages or an alternate email account to which you have regular access. With 2-step verification you will always know when someone is logging on to your account from another computer. The first few times you log in, you will need to verify the device you are using with a confirmation code triggered by 2-step verification. This is for your protection. Many of my clients have had their accounts hijacked and the easiest way for them to do this is by logging in as you.

Another way, which you cannot control is for them to get into your account by hacking the Comcast, Yahoo or other servers. Yes, it has happened. People on your contact list will call you to find out if you are OK because of the message they received from you. You need to call the provider and tell them about the problem. They will restore your account in most cases and get your contacts back. The faster you take action, the better your chances that no damage will be done.

Improvements to your computer experience

How to make things better? The easiest upgrade is a larger display. The cost is generally low with a large improvement in your computing experience. Many older displays are around 22 inches but new computer systems are now using 27 or 32 inch displays, some curved. With the upgrade is usually an improvement in resolution as well.

Keyboard acting strange? Is it wireless? Have you checked your batteries? Same with your mouse. If you have a wired keyboard and mouse but it is acting odd, there are two possible causes. First, it could just be a Windows update waiting for a restart. Second, try disconnecting and reconnecting or move the keyboard and/or mouse to a different USB port.

Do you use a UPS (Uninterruptible Power Source, battery backup power strip). Be aware that the batteries in these are lead/acid and typically only last for about three years. Just replace the battery unless you need new features on your UPS like more connections or longer power outage time (bigger battery). If you don’t have one of these, consider it if you are in an area where the power is likely to go out. They are designed so the computer will stay on long enough to shut it down normally. This can protect your modem and computer parts from damage.

Windows 11

I am sure you are all aware that Microsoft introduced a new Windows operating system in December 2021. Those with Windows 10 received messages about this version, prompting you to check if your computer is eligible. Few older computers will be upgradable. Usually, the CPU is not compatible so only a newer computer will allow you to use Windows 11. Not to worry, Windows 10 will continue to be supported for about three years (October 2025). If your computer indicates it is possible to upgrade to Windows 11, I recommend you do this. I have seen very few issues and find the transition easy enough. The most noticeable difference is the location of the Start button (Windows icon on the lower left), which is now more centered on the task bar. The ClassicShell menu I have installed on most client computers will not work on Windows 11. It's an easy menu, and if you need help, just let me know. Updates will still be automatic. These are important to complete due to security changes, so don't put them off for long. Please note that pending updates and restart requests will show up on the taskbar, lower right, near the date and time. Two circle arrows indicate the icon for the Windows updates and you will see a dot over the icon indicating the current status. Green means that all is OK, orange, that an update is pending and red, that a restart is pending. You'll notice pending updates if odd things are happening when you try to use your computer: menus won't open or won't respond to your commands. This is the time to check for this icon to see if there is a pending update. The old commands are still available in Windows 11, in the Control Panel which you can access by clicking on the Start button and typing Control Panel.

Antivirus

For many years I have used and recommended AVG and recently have been recommending TotalAV, but I need to change my position on this now. It turns out that Microsoft has made significant improvements to Defender and it is now one of the top-rated antivirus applications. It is built into Windows 10 and Windows 11, it just needs to be turned on. In most cases it is turned on automatically if you have no antivirus application installed. This is easy to check however, look at the icons on the lower left of your display in the taskbar, near the date and time display. There will be an icon with a shield (blue or white) and it will sometimes have a circle with some indicator in the circle showing the current status of Windows Defender. A green check mark indicates that everything is OK but anything else means that your attention is needed. Double click the icon to open the window and see what is needed. If you wish to start using Defender, just uninstall your current antivirus and turn on Defender. In the last few months since my last newsletter, I have been uninstalling AVG and setting up Windows Defender remotely when I am doing remote work for clients.

You can also opt for the paid version of antivirus programs. I now recommend the top rated Bitdefender, though it is not a program I have used. I am currently using Windows Defender. You can also add a VPN which will give you much better security overall if you have concerns. I am using ExpressVPN but there are built in VPN options now in Windows 11, (**Start > Settings > Network & internet > VPN.**) 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. MalwareBytes gives me an added sense of security because it runs in a different location than the antivirus and will find malware that other applications will miss. All have free versions.

Upgrade your hard drive to speed up the computer

The cost of SSD have dropped (about \$30 per 500gig). As a result, I have been doing many upgrades of older computer with conventional hard drives to SSD drives. The total cost for just the upgrade is usually under \$100 for a 500gig drive and under \$120 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 \$40. The upgrade transfers all the information, including programs (applications) so everything looks the same but is four times faster. If you have a larger drive and you are using a very small amount of the space, I can shrink the size and put the image on a smaller SSD to save you some money. I have done many of these in the last three years (about 200), and it makes a big difference for my clients. It takes me about a day to get the SSD and then I can turn them around in about 24 hours to complete the transplant. I can do these on laptops or desktops and I have even done iMacs.

In Closing

Much of my business is tuning up computers and helping with minor issues. 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 and really love doing this work. Remember, clean out those dead files using Disk Cleanup and CCleaner. Check your antivirus status and be sure Windows is up to date. Every quarter, run CCleaner and Malwarebytes.

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.



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