

Radio Days – 2013-01-26

Tip of the Week – Anti-Virus Update Woes

Some things seem to be designed to bring frustration to your life. Over this last week I have seen a number of clients who either could not update or upgrade their commercial anti-virus program. This, given my insistence on having working protection when you are online, is not to be tolerated.

Update Woes

One client could not update their anti-virus program's definitions file. Each time we tried to update these definition files the program displayed an error message stating that there was a problem updating the virus definition file. The next step was to try to uninstall then re-install the program in the hope that this would remove the problem.

This, in itself, was a hassle. After repeated attempts to download the program to reinstall her anti-virus program my client said that enough was enough and asked if there was a solution to the problem which would just work. Then, with her permission, I installed my current favourite anti-virus program: Microsoft Security Essentials. I like this program because I have never had this problem with it: it just works in the background. Definition files are checked for updates when you go online and are installed automatically if present.

And, best of all, there is no need to upgrade the program: this just happens automatically.

Upgrade Woes

The other problem occurred with a client who had bought a Windows 8 computer. I always recommend that people use an anti-virus program so she asked me to install her existing one on her new computer. She had tried this without success and hoped that I could succeed where she had failed. The main problem was that the CD which she had bought would not load on Windows 8 so it suggested downloading the latest version. We did this download but the program would not install using her current installation key.

After a long call to tech support we received a new installation key but installing the program using this key was not successful: it aborted with an obscure error message so this prompted another call to tech support. This call, too, produced another installation key and another unsuccessful installation so we decided to stop wasting time.

Again, I installed my favourite anti-virus program: Microsoft Security Essentials. I like this program because I have never had such a problem with it: it just works in the background.

Uninstalling Excess Anti-Virus Programs

If you find that your anti-virus program needs to be replaced for whatever reason you must check to see that there is no other anti-virus program on your computer. The reason for this is simple: imagine two people who both want to go through a door at the same time. If they go in single file there is no problem: the problem starts when they both try to be the first person to go through that door. They then find that there is a traffic jam and the whole process slows down.

An anti-virus program needs to be the first program to check any program that you run to ensure that it is safe to be run. If you have two anti-virus programs trying to be the first to check a program for errors your computer will slow dramatically while your two anti-virus programs fight for supremacy. Some people think that, if one anti-virus program is good, two or even more anti-virus programs is the best protection.

This ain't true!

Please remove all but the best anti-virus program from your computer. When you buy a new computer it will probably have a trial version of an anti-virus program installed: this means that, if you install Microsoft Security Essentials, you will need to uninstall this trial version. The best program that I know for uninstalling any program is Revo Uninstaller. Download

this free program and use it to uninstall all but one of your anti-virus programs. If you are not sure which of your programs are anti-virus programs you could either look a program up on the web or get help. When you uninstall a program using Revo Uninstaller please take the fourth option, *Advanced*, as this gives the best results.

Keeping Your Computer Up To Date

Many clients have asked me if it is necessary to install the updates which Microsoft suggests. I always answer *Yes!* because there are viruses and other ways of attacking your computer which take advantage of holes in Windows' security, holes which, in many cases, had been patched years earlier. However, because computer users had not installed these patches, their computers were able to be compromised and thus infected with the latest exploit to take advantage of the patched holes.

Attacking Windows' holes, of course, is not the only way to attack a computer. It is also necessary to keep all your programs up to date. There is a simple to use free program which helps you keep all your other programs up to date.

Updating Windows

Windows' updates are easy to install. First you need to ensure that your computer is set to install updates automatically. In Control Panel you will see an item called *Windows Update*. Click on this and make sure that the option is set to *Install updates automatically*. This will make sure that your copy of Windows is as up to date as it can be.

Please be aware that you may need to restart your computer to complete the installation of some of the updates which Windows has downloaded. This is normal and does not mean that there is a problem with your computer.

If you have selected another option in Windows Update you may have to take more actions to keep your copy of Windows updated. This, again, is normal and is your choice. If you are happy taking control of keeping your copy of Windows updated then by all means do this. I do, however, recommend that, for the vast majority of my clients, the automatic route is best.

Which option you chose is up to you but I strongly recommend that you keep your computer up to date because Microsoft has gone to a lot of trouble to help you keep your computer safe. The consequences of not keeping your computer fully patched are too numerous to mention and are obvious to anyone who has been infected with a virus.

Updating Programs

Windows, like all computer programs, has holes which allow infections to get in. All the other programs on your computer also have holes which need to be patched to keep them up to date as well. Windows can patch itself but most other programs do not yet have this ability.

There is a free program which will help you keep your programs at the latest version. This program is *Secunia PSI* and it is the best way that I know of keeping all the programs on your computer up to date.

There are some programs which it cannot update. One reason for a program not being able to be updated is that the manufacturer has stopped updating the version which you have. An obvious example of this sort of program is a common one: Adobe PDF Reader. This program is installed on many computers but I recommend a better one: Foxit PDF Reader. Both of these programs are free to download from the internet, but the Foxit reader is smaller and quicker so is the one which I recommend for most users.

Secunia PSI will update many programs automatically, but this does not mean that it updates all programs automatically. It does, fortunately, show all the programs which it has not yet updated and this allows you to make your own decision what to do with these programs. You have a number of options:

- Mark the program to be ignored by Secunia PSI. This means that you will need to be responsible for the updates to this program. This is the appropriate action to take if the program has been made *end of life* by the manufacturer. Programs which are end of life will not have any more updates so there is no point in trying to update them.
- Where PSI cannot do an automatic update (perhaps because the program comes in a number of languages) you will have to do the update manually. Mozilla Firefox is an example of this sort of program, and the easiest way to update programs like this is to download and install the latest update manually. This does not take long and gives you the latest and safest version.
- Uninstall the program. This is the most appropriate action to take for many programs which have been superseded.

Sometimes, of course, it is difficult knowing which is the best action to take. This may be the best time to call in a professional. There are many computer shops and consultants who offer a service of updating your copy of Windows and all your programs each year so that you have the best possible experience with your computer.

Further Information

Microsoft Security Essentials	www.microsoft.com/mse
Revo Uninstaller	www.revouninstaller.com
Secunia PSI	www.secunia.com