

Be Web Wise -Protect yourself online

The internet has many nasties that can damage your computer and corrupt your personal data.

Viruses are programs designed to damage your computer. They corrupt your files causing them to become unreadable, or they can delete important files meaning programs like windows won't run correctly. You can acquire viruses from emails, surfing the net, sharing CDs, floppy disks, thumb drives or installing software that is infected. Viruses are transferred by opening infected files. The best way to stop your computer getting a virus is by installing an antivirus program, keeping it up to date and scanning emails, CDs, floppy disks, thumb drives and downloaded files before you open them.

Trojans are programs that give hackers access to your computer. They get the name from the Trojan Horse of Troy. They appear to be a beneficial program, but once installed your computer's security is weakened meaning anyone, or anything, can get in. Files can be lost and personal data including credit card numbers can be stolen.

Worms are designed to spread through a computer's system, usually where networks are involved and mainly via emails. If you receive an email from an unknown address, or there is an unexpected attachment, don't reply and always delete the email. This will minimise the chance of the worm infecting your computer. Worms are used by spammers to make your computer send spam to thousands of email addresses. This will cause your computer to be very slow on the net; eventually it may even crash. Worms will also increase your internet bill if you have a monthly download limit.

Spyware and Adware monitor your computer and the websites you visit. They redirect you to other related advertisement websites. Spyware and Adware can introduce pop up advertisements, change your homepage, slow you computer and internet speed or install unwanted programs.

Another type of computer nasty is a 'Rogue Program'. Rogue programs are designed by hackers to look like legitimate Antivirus software. They often tell you that your computer is infected with a virus and to install (and pay for) their program to clear the virus. These rogue programs can install spyware, adware, trojans or viruses.

To protect yourself online you need an antivirus program. An antivirus program will usually identify the virus before you open the file, preventing you from losing data. Without antivirus programs you risk important files or personal data being stolen by hackers.

There are a few free programs you can download that will help protect your computer.

AVG Free 8.0 can be downloaded from www.free.grisoft.com and offers basic protection against viruses and spyware. I have loaded this on many machines and have avoided any major virus problems. If you don't feel safe using a free antivirus program, AVG Internet Security offers more protection as it has a firewall, anti-spam, and a few other options not in the free version.

AVG only offers basic spyware protection with its antivirus protection. I recommend downloading two additional free programs. Spybot Search & Destroy (www.safer-networking.org) cleans Spyware, Adware and Malware from your computer. Ad-Aware 2007 Free (http://www.lavasoftusa.com/products/ad_aware_free.php) removes trojans, worms, and other malicious programs. There is a professional version of Ad-Aware 2007 which offers real-time protection to keep you safe as you surf the web.

Windows has a built-in firewall which is suitable for most people. If you're an advanced user, a firewall will offer more protective options. An example is ZoneAlarm Internet Security. This has a Triple Defence Firewall and comes with Anti-Spyware and Antivirus. ZoneAlarm Internet Security offers excellent online protection.

If your internet bills are higher than normal, your computer is slow on the net, displays pop ups, experiences homepage changes or your computer is just not working as it should, pop down and see Josh at the CTC or call on 6343 1720.

There will be free 'Webwise' classes held at the CTC in June. To book your spot or find out more information about the classes call Josh on 6343 1720 or drop in and see him at the Old Commonwealth Bank building.