

DWPC Technology Newsletter

Technology news from David W. Potts Consulting
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Volume 1 Number 1 May-June, 2012



Welcome to the premiere edition of the David W. Potts Consulting *DWPC Technology Newsletter*. I hope you find this information helpful. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please send me an email, indicating such. If you received this newsletter from a friend and wish to be added to the mailing list, please email me at the address above and indicate your desire to receive the newsletter.

The DNSChanger malware has infected over 500,000 computers, worldwide. The FBI implemented servers to allow infected computers to continue to function . . . and has had these servers in place for months. The U.S. Government will pull the plug on these servers in July (2012). When the plug is pulled, computers still infected will be unable to use the Internet. There is an easy test to find if your computer(s) is infected, by visiting the following FBI Web site and selecting the top link (URL) in the list (“maintained by the DNS Changer Working Group”): <https://forms.fbi.gov/check-to-see-if-your-computer-is-using-rogue-DNS>. You should be immediately directed to a Web site where you will be informed if your computer is infected by the “DNSChanger” malware. Here is a link to the issue from CBS in L.A.: <http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2012/04/23/fbi-dns-changer-victims-could-lose-internet-access-in-july/>. The FBI has more information on the issue at this link: http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2011/november/malware_110911/DNS-changer-malware.pdf. If you use your computer in multiple locations, you should run the test while connected to each network.

Malware continues to be a big problem. To keep your computer safe, it is necessary to keep your software updated (e.g. Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office, Mozilla Firefox, Adobe Flash Player, Adobe Reader, Java, etc.), keep your antivirus software current and update and run your anti-malware software on a regular basis. According to Microsoft, the “User Account Control” feature in Microsoft Windows Vista and Microsoft Windows 7 allow these operating systems to be 30% less likely to be infected by viruses and malware than earlier versions of Microsoft Windows (including Microsoft Windows XP). For those who prefer not updating their computers themselves, David W. Potts Consulting offers remote and onsite preventative maintenance for computers running Microsoft Windows. Please contact us for details.

But I have a Mac . . . Yes, Macs are less prone to viruses and malware than Windows computers. Did you notice I stated they were “less prone” and not “immune”? In addition to other threats, **there is currently a BotNet infecting over 600,000 Macs** worldwide, called “Flashback”, infecting an estimated 450,000 Macs in the USA and Canada. Please keep in mind that, if your Mac also runs Windows, the Windows installation needs the same Windows, software, antivirus and antimalware updates and scans as a “regular” Windows computer, to be secure. Sorry . . . David W. Potts Consulting doesn’t work with Macs (although we can help you with your iOS device such as iPhone, iPod or iPad with your Windows computer), but we know many of our clients either have Macs as well as PCs, or know people with Macs . . . and want to help ensure everyone is secure. The “geniuses” at Apple stores can usually assist with Mac virus issues.

Are you still running Windows XP? There are two significant events on the horizon of which you should be aware. The first is the sunset of Microsoft Windows XP. Microsoft plans to stop support for Windows XP on April 8, 2014, meaning Microsoft will no longer deliver critical updates to Windows XP. Some security vendors stop supporting their anti-virus [and firewall] software when, or shortly after, Microsoft stops supporting the OS. You certainly do not want to run your computer without anti-virus . . . but you could also be open to other malicious attacks when the OS no longer receives critical updates to patch vulnerabilities.

The second significant event is the introduction of Microsoft Windows 8. With Windows 8, Microsoft is making the largest change to the user interface since the introduction of Windows 95. In Windows 8, things will operate much differently than you are accustomed.

What does this mean to you? A few things could impact you. Any computer running Windows XP will begin to become increasingly more vulnerable once Microsoft's support ends (and even more so once anti-virus support ends). As such, you will want to ensure you have replaced computers that are running Windows XP before Microsoft stops supporting the product. Once Microsoft releases their new OS (Windows 8), they will likely start pushing vendors to sell this new OS. The availability of the next-newest OS (Windows 7) will likely begin to dwindle, then, if things go as they have in the past, Microsoft pulls the plug and stops allowing vendors to sell the older OS, forcing you to use their newest OS [on new computers]. Although Microsoft indicates most programs and hardware that works with Windows 7 should work with Windows 8, the user interface is very different, which will likely cause a learning curve, and there could be some updates or upgrades required for some software or hardware.

If you do not want to be forced to use Windows 8 [on new computers], the safest option is to purchase replacement computer(s) before the release of Windows 8. Although Microsoft has not identified the release date for Windows 8, many analysts are speculating the release to be in October of this year.

There is a free "Consumer Preview" of Windows 8 available on the Microsoft Web site that you can load on a computer (or into a "virtual machine" if you are so inclined). Please review the FAQs on the Microsoft Web site before installing the Windows 8 Consumer Preview.

The high cost of antivirus software? You will likely pay a higher price to eradicate a virus from a computer than if you would have kept a current antivirus subscription on your computer. Did you know you can get **free, high quality, antivirus protection**? Many ISPs (Internet Service Providers) provide free antivirus software to their customers. As an example, the Comcast [home cable modem] service includes protection for up to 7 computers, providing the Norton Security Suite—for Windows and Mac. If your ISP does not provide free antivirus software, there are free options available, not only for "non-commercial use" (such as AVG Free), but Microsoft's Security Essentials software, which is licensed for free use on commercial computers (please read the license agreement for limitations). The Microsoft Security Essentials software, available from the "Security" link on the www.microsoft.com Web site, is meant to be used in conjunction with the Microsoft Windows Firewall.

Do I need a new computer? Clients often want me to repair a computer I find to be 5 years old or older. Depending on the problem(s) and the speed and configuration of the computer, I often suggest, rather than fixing the older computer, the client consider replacing it. Technology advances and computers continue to get faster and less expensive. I often have clients who, after I have transitioned them to a new computer, exclaim how they wish they would have transitioned sooner. Unless you require a specialty device, basic desktop and notebook computers are both inexpensive. If your computer can keep up with you while you use it, you may be fine (especially if you are not running Windows XP). If, however, you find yourself waiting for your computer often, you may need consulting to resolve performance problems with your existing computer or to help you decide to consider its replacement. David W. Potts Consulting can assist you with troubleshooting performance issues and make recommendations. If the computer is replaced, we can assist with transitioning data from your old computer to a new computer. We can also configure computers (old or new) to be safer. Please refer to the items "Are you still running Windows XP?", "What does this mean to you" and "If you do not want to be forced to use Windows 8 . . .", earlier in this newsletter.

How do I . . . Please submit questions to me via email. Questions may be answered in future issues of this newsletter, or may be addressed individually. I often have clients who exclaim, after my correcting their issue, how they have been frustrated by working on the issue for weeks before calling me. Often the problem takes less than an hour to correct. Many mention how, next time, they will call me first to avoid the frustration!

David W. Potts Consulting will be happy to assist you with your hardware, software and network selection, purchase, integration, troubleshooting and training. We specialize in Microsoft Windows computers and networking and can also assist you with other electronics consulting.