



DWPC Technology Newsletter

Technology news from David W. Potts Consulting, LLC

david.w.potts@att.net www.oregoncomputer.com 503.659.5588

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Welcome to the fortieth edition of the *DWPC Technology Newsletter*. We hope you find this information helpful. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please send us an email, indicating such. If you received this newsletter from a friend and wish to be added to the mailing list, please send an email to the address above and indicate your desire to receive the newsletter. Please feel free to share this newsletter with your friends.

Potential data loss during Windows V. 1809 update! Microsoft has released its latest incarnation of Windows, with the October, 2018 update, V. 1809. **Unfortunately, there have been reports of data disappearing, after the update completes.** Although I always encourage users to back up their computers, it is especially important to back up your computer before any major upgrade (hardware or software). There have been updates that have “bricked” computers (making them unusable), so backing up not only safeguards your data, but helps protect you from updates-gone-bad or helps recover from from viruses or ransomware. All currently-supported versions of Microsoft Windows allow image backups to a USB hard disk drive. This is very inexpensive insurance! Please contact us if you have questions about your backup strategy . . . or need to create one!

Is your computer really scanning for viruses? Most of the antivirus offerings perform periodic scans, along with “real-time” scanning (scanning for viruses as things are loaded on your computer). Unfortunately, many antivirus programs will not run a “full scan,” unless this is explicitly requested (the periodic scans are often “quick scans”--only for core files, leaving the majority of the files on the computer unscanned). As such, if you do not periodically run a full scan, manually, you could still be infected. I strongly suggest all users perform a full virus scan on their Windows computers, at least monthly.

What is cryptocurrency? “Cryptocurrency,” measured in “coins” (or fractions of “coins”), is “digital currency” that can be “earned,” traded or redeemed. Cryptocurrency is “earned” by “cryptomining”--allowing an entity to use some of the computing power of a computer, to perform specific tasks. For many years, SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, has offered a utility that users can install on their computer to allow it to use some of its power to help perform calculations to look for signs of extraterrestrial life. This result is a virtual supercomputer, using small amounts of the processing power of many thousands of computers. Cryptomining uses a similar concept, but, rather than donating the computer’s resources, the processing done earns cryptocurrency. One major roadblock is that, at this juncture, it takes a great deal of computing resources to mine any significant amount of cryptocurrency. Unfortunately, when you look at the great model SETI uses, there are those who choose to use the technology for evil. Therein was born cryptomining malware. That leads me into my next article, Cryptomining malware.

Cryptomining malware (or, “why is my computer so slow?!”) “Cryptocurrency,” measured in “coins” (or fractions of “coins”), is “digital currency” and is “mined” by computers, that perform tasks requested by the mining program. People purchase high-end computers with high-end graphics cards (the processors of GPUs, or graphical processing units, can be used to perform the calculations used for mining cryptocurrency), to mine cryptocurrency, but it takes lots of power to mine any significant amount. Along comes malware. There are malicious programs that will turn a computer into a “bot” that will mine cryptocurrency . . . depositing the “earnings” into someone else’s account! With this model, the malicious software author infects thousands of computers, making them mine the cryptocurrency for them. There is even “legitimate” software that allows a user to opt-out of ads by authorizing it to use your computer to mine cryptocurrency for that entity. At least they ask! I have read that cryptomining malware is more profitable than other malware, including ransomware (you must recover from backup for many ransomware infections, as well as some other infections from malicious software). Cryptomining malware can cause a computer to slow, significantly. It can also hide in the bowels of Windows, making it very difficult to eradicate. Ensure you are backed up, have User Account Control enabled and answer UAC questions, appropriately!

Happy holidays—2018 techie gift list! This last year has flown by. I hope it has been a great one for you. If you are looking for tech gifts for someone special . . . or for yourself (*have you been good, this year?*), you have many options . . . there are a number of good cell phone options, as well as the potential to switch your phone carrier or plan. Tablets, drones, 3D printers and MFPs (multifunction peripherals—printer/scanner/copier[/fax]) remain hot commodities. Large LED monitors continue to come down in price and their resolution continues to increase. 4K (UHD) TVs offer 4x the resolution of 1080p displays, producing displays that mimic nature—and many are now reasonably priced. If your techie friend has a UHD monitor, they may want a UHD Blu-Ray player or disks . . . (players can “upscale” older content, like DVDs, to UHD). I still consider curved screens to be more hype than benefit. OLED (organic light-emitting diode) monitors are beginning to come down in price. If you want a HUGE screen, many projection options, including 3D and UHD models, can be a cost-effective solution. Sound bars and Surround Sound systems can augment the sound of a flat screen TV, and some include wireless subwoofers that connect to wired surround (rear) speakers. Universal remote controls are also a good gift (I continue to like the Logitech Harmony series). Desktop, notebook, UltraBook, tablet and convertible computers continue to get faster and less expensive. USB hard disk drives for backup (or a subscription to an online (Cloud-based) backup service) are also great gifts.

How do I update my Internet modem or gateway? We all have Internet modems or gateways (a gateway is a modem that includes a router . . . a wireless gateway adds WiFi). The FBI recently advised users to ensure the firmware in their router(s) are updated and the devices restarted. If you own your router or gateway, you should be able to update its firmware, yourself. You should be able to find the operators manual for the device, on the manufacturer’s Website, describing how to update the firmware. If you lease the gateway, often, the ISP does not allow a consumer to update the firmware in their equipment. With some equipment, available firmware updates are downloaded and automatically installed, when the device restarts. In some cases, replacing the equipment is required. If you lease your Internet gateway, contact your ISP to find how you can ensure it has the latest firmware version.

Scam and Fraud Resources are available through the office of the Oregon Attorney General. As scammers are quickly creating elaborate ways to separate you from your money, I strongly suggest you use complex passwords, that you change often, and visit the Oregon Attorney General's Web site at www.oregonconsumer.gov, to keep abreast of newer scams and help learn ways to keep you and your family safer, and report potential scams. You can also contact Ellen Klem of the Oregon Attorney General's office at ellen.klem@state.or.us or 503.507.1061.

Java and QuickTime security alerts! As Oracle's Java and Apple’s QuickTime continue to be security risks, I am continuing to include warnings in my newsletters. You can view the alert from the US Computer Emergency Readiness Team about QuickTime, at <https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA16-105A>. Oracle has a Web page that details how to disable Java, at: http://www.java.com/en/download/help/disable_browser.xml. Either program can be uninstalled from the Windows Programs and Features Control Panel. If you do need to run Java, ensure you are using the latest release and remove any old versions. If you have any questions about this or other security issues (or any other computer questions), please feel free to contact David W. Potts Consulting and we will be happy to help you.

How do I . . . Please submit questions to me via email to the email address at the top of page 1. 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 an 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! I have helped people do things from selecting and programming a high-tech remote control to setting up a company’s network infrastructure.

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 home theatre and other electronics and technology consulting.

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