



Doctors Orders

Hello and welcome to spring.

The boss has been walking around like the cat who got the cream for the last few days. When he told us that we would have two inspectors from Trading Standards checking our records and speaking to our customers, we thought someone had murdered a customer. (The ultimate sin).

But no! It turns out that we had applied and been granted, membership of the new "Buy with Confidence" initiative by Northampton Council's Trading Standards. (more on page 2)

Despite the above, the boss is still smarting after seven customers accused us of spamming them after we sent out a general email warning them of a scam from India, that several customers fell for. Even though lots of people told us they appreciated what we were trying to do, it's the odd few that miss the point that seems to have stuck in his craw.

And of course, as I'm bottom of the food chain, it's me that suffers. He had me blowing the dust and fluff out of 8 PC towers that come in for upgrading, from an animal sanctuary. By the time I had finished I looked like next door's Irish Wolfhound on a bad hair day. I had that much hair stuck to my face that the workshop manager actually accused me of being a werewolf!

Then "Big Baps" arrived (the lady that drives the sandwich van) I went out to get everyone's rolls and sandwiches, as usual. She looked at me twice, then said, with a serious look "you better not have the garlic bread, lovey, it might make your hair fall out".

Craig



<http://twitter.com/CraigtheTrainee>

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Computer Doctors - Trading Standards Approved

Computer Doctors are one of the first companies to be approved under the new Northamptonshire Trading Standards initiative "Buy with Confidence".



In response to concerns about 'rogue traders' which are often highlighted in the media, a partnership of Local Authority Trading Standards Services have taken a ground-breaking step by putting together the Buy With Confidence Scheme. The scheme provides consumers with a list of local businesses which have given their commitment to trading fairly. Every business listed has undergone a series of detailed checks before being approved as a member of the scheme.

In order to become a Buy With Confidence member, a business must first apply or be recommended to join the scheme and must then pass a set of tailored background checks. Membership of the scheme is not given lightly. Amongst other checks, each applicant will have their complaints history reviewed and will receive a visit from Trading Standards. Good references are required from previous customers and applicants must agree to abide by the scheme's code of conduct, which requires them to follow the letter and spirit of the law. Criminal records disclosure may also be required in some circumstances.

Only if all the scheme requirements are met, will a business be granted membership, and their conduct will continue to be monitored thereafter. Trading standards obviously cannot promise that Buy With Confidence members' work will be perfect every time, but you can expect any problems to be dealt with fairly by the business, and you can turn to Trading Standards for advice in the event of an unresolved issue.

The Buy with Confidence website www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk has a search facility where you can search for any sort of trader and although it's still early days for the Northamptonshire area, I am sure that as more traders come on stream it will become a useful resource for all members of the public.

Most of the counties along the south coast of England have schemes up and running and there are plenty of approved traders in each category to choose from. It works for everyone because if customers prefer to give their custom to approved traders, not only do they get a professional job done but the rogue traders quickly get marginalised and get put out of business. A plus for everybody.

For us the act of being inspected by Trading Standards was quite cathartic. First reaction is to get a bit protective of the various systems being scrutinised, especially when we have always considered ourselves to be fair minded in all our dealings with the public. But after a while we realised that some of our systems were out of date and could really do with a bit of shake up.

We have changed several of our procedures in the light of the advice that we were given. Our website was examined intensely and recommendations were made to improve our terms and conditions and some other aspects of the site to make it conform to modern standards.

Fortunately, all our engineers that visit customers homes and offices, already have had a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check, which is a standard requirement for our engineers and is required for any person visiting schools etc. Although the CRB check is above the requirement for Buy with Confidence traders, these were checked to see that they were up to date with no errors.

Being approved for membership of this scheme means a lot to us, as it's one way of proving to our customers that we really do want to give them value for money and are genuinely concerned when things go wrong.

There is a saying in the IT industry, that you are only as good as your last repair, but we like to think how the company reacts when things go wrong is a measure of how good that company is. Do they put the problem right, quickly and efficiently or do they fob you off and hope that you will give up and go away?

If you visit our surgery in Northampton, you will be given a customer feedback form on behalf of Trading standards. Its only a few simple questions and a post paid envelope. You are not obliged to fill it in, but if you do, you will be helping maintain the high standard of service that you have come to expect from Computer Doctors.

Obviously, we all make mistakes and if you have a complaint we would like to know about it as well so that we can put it right.

We have been given approval to use the above logo on our website, premises and vehicles and we will display this proudly. So be sure to keep an eye out for it locally as more and more traders commit themselves to giving their customers a fair deal.

New names, new threats from fake security apps

We've mentioned these malicious applications posing as antivirus software before, but they're more common than ever — and more sophisticated.

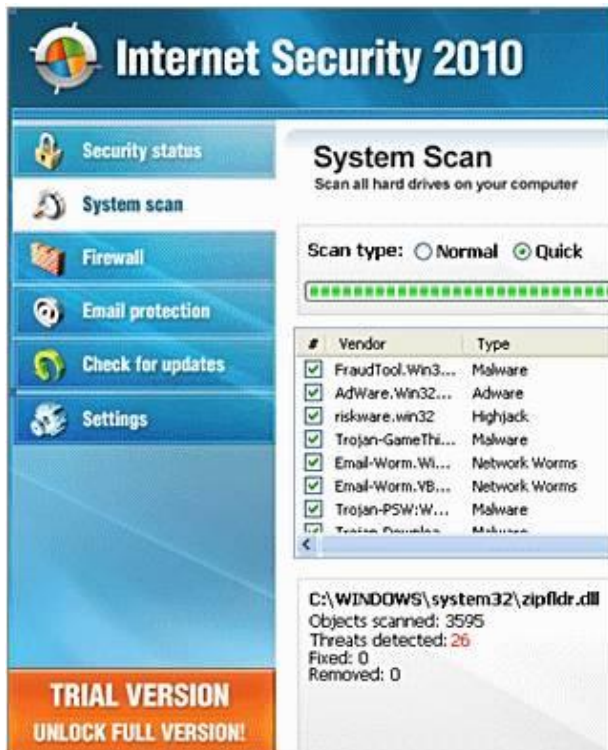
They pop up on your screen, warning you that your system is infected with all kinds of viruses. It's true, your PC is infected — but the infection is the warning, itself.

I'll describe one of the newest rogue anti-malware threats and tell you how to find out whether a pop-up app is a fake.

The other day a regular customer called to say that his XP computer has 37 viruses on it.

He was a victim of rogue anti-malware — malicious software that often comes disguised as an antivirus warning on your PC screen. Names for this class of malicious app include scareware, fake AV, and some labels unfit for print.

Most personal computer users have seen these warnings at one time or another. The rogue program will have a seemingly legitimate appearance and title such as Internet Security 2010. Typically, it claims to have scanned your computer and found numerous viruses. The app then offers to remove them — but not before you pay a fee to the bogus antivirus company.



More-cynical readers may well snicker that many well-established antivirus products also use scare tactics to extract fees. But rogue software differs in intent — in the simplest cases, it's taking your hard-earned money without returning anything of value.

The newest rogues go well beyond a simple shakedown — they install botnets, spyware, and other hazardous programs. Some install backdoors that allow hackers to control your PC. Most insidious, some rogues block access to the very Web sites that help eliminate malware. Rogues are also highly adept at fending off attempts to uninstall them or to banish them to the gates of malware hell, where they belong.

New and improved scareware: Internet Security 2010

Internet Security 2010 is one of the newest examples of rogue anti-malware. Microsoft puts it into a family of Trojan apps called Trojan:Win32/Fakeinit, but it has many aliases. You might encounter it as Advanced Virus Remover, Anti-virus XP Pro, or Security Essentials 2010. Microsoft has a detailed list on its Malware Protection Centre site. <http://www.microsoft.com/security/portal/Threat/Encyclopedia/Entry.aspx?Name=Trojan:Win32/Fakeinit>

Internet Security 2010 (and other members of its Fakeinit group) blocks access to sites that might zap it. When you try one of the sites, your browser shows a bogus Restricted Site message.

It also turns off many important programs on your computer, including all Office programs, most games, QuickTime Player, Photoshop, and even MS Paint and MS Calculator. Running those programs may bring the warning: The file is infected. Please activate your antivirus software. It also tries to disable Task Manager and the Internet Explorer Phishing Filter.

If it looks suspicious, it's probably a rogue

Most of the big anti-malware companies have toned down their scareware tactics, perhaps worrying that their products might be confused with rogue apps. Microsoft's free Security Essentials possibly stifled the boisterous begging as well. Nowadays, if a warning pops up on your screen saying you're infected and must download a clean-up program, chances are good you're staring at a come-on from a rogue. Or if a pop-up offers a free scan of your system, more than a little scepticism is in order.

Identifying specific rogue programs through a Google search can be extraordinarily difficult because the names keep changing. For example, just one rogue program, known as "The Chameleon," can display many variations of the following names: XP Guardian 2010, XP Antivirus Pro 2010, Vista Antispyware 2010, Vista Guardian, Win 7 Internet Security, or Win 7 Internet Security 2010.

Fortunately, several Web resources maintain thorough lists of known rogues. One of the best is Bharath's Security blog, maintained by malware expert Bharath Narayan. <http://bharath-m-narayan.blogspot.com/>

Bharath includes removal instructions and points to free programs that work — in my experience.

Money drives the bogus protection come-on

Creating rogue programs and convincing people to install them is a growth industry. Why? Money — lots of it. Like most malware today, rogue anti-malware ends up in a PC because the user was duped into downloading it. This type of malware is even more insidious because it's disguised as software that removes malicious apps. Rogue software is delivered to a computer from many sources — e-mail attachments, Web sites, infected USB drives, Web ads, and even downloaded videos. Other sources include security holes in Windows, Acrobat Reader, and Flash.

Alternative Browser makers demand screen time

Makers of small web browsers want their programs to be given more prominence on Microsoft's browser choice screen.

Six software firms have complained to the EU saying many do not realise their programs were on offer.

To see all 12 web browsers, users must scroll to the right when viewing Microsoft's ballot screen.

The choice is being offered as part of a settlement of an anti-trust case brought against Microsoft by the European Commission.

Global choice

"The final choice screen design leaves the vast majority of users unaware that there are more than five browsers to choose from," the six firms said in their petition.

The petition is signed by the makers of the Avant, Flock, Maxthon, Slim, Sleipnir and Green browsers. The makers of the other browser on offer, K-Meleon, did not sign it.

From 1 March, the browser choice have been popping up on the screens of millions of Europeans who have Internet Explorer as their default web browser.

The browser choice screen is designed as a single panel. Scrolling to the right reveals all twelve browsers on offer.

"We are only requesting the simple addition of any text or design element, that would indicate to an average user that there are choices 'to the right of the visible screen'," said the petition.

Microsoft said that the browser choice screen was drawn up to be compliant with the deal agreed with the European Commission.

Early reports suggest the browser choice screen is leading to a rise in the numbers of people trying browsers other than Internet Explorer.

In a statement, Opera said it had seen downloads of its browser increase threefold since the choice screen system started rolling out.

At the same time, the European Committee for Interoperable Systems (ECIS) has asked for the browser choice system to be repeated around the world.

In a statement it called on "competition agencies around the world to give their consumers the benefit of browser choice, which will spur competition and improve the Web experience for all".

So far, the ECIS campaign has got no further than an open letter on the organisation's site. However, it did not rule out a more active campaign on the issue of browser choice.

ECIS members include long-time Microsoft rivals Oracle, IBM, Red Hat, Opera and Adobe.

PC prices on the up!

Late breaking news, computer parts actually increasing in price!

At the time of writing the pound sterling is still dropping in value against the dollar and this is the cause of computer hardware and software actually increasing in price.

We've got so used to prices going down, it comes as a bit of a surprise when prices actually go up.

No matter if you are buying from a UK wholesaler or direct from a far Eastern conglomerate, the price is all to do with the value of the dollar.

A \$200 monitor last week cost us £125, this week its £130. I know it doesn't sound much but that's 25% of the average mark up disappeared in one week.

So what do all us retailers do? Well we put our prices up of course. But what about the stock we already have which we've paid less for? Well we could just put up the prices and not tell anyone, or we could sell at our existing price and not increase the price until we get new stock.

So that's what we've done.

To be perfectly honest, that's what we always do. When we get new stock, we fix the price until that stock is replaced.

So this means that \$200 monitor still costs £125 this week or to be more accurate £99.95 because we bought them three weeks ago.

So if you are looking for a bargain take a look at our online shop.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/shop

All desktop and laptop PC's, printers, monitors, and a host of other parts and accessories have their prices frozen until we restock.

We have Dell PC's at £199.95, full Acer systems with 19" Monitor, keyboard, mouse and speakers for £299.95, 19" monitors for £99.95, Netbooks for £275 and Windows 7 laptops for £345. all-in-one printers from £39.95 and a host of other parts and accessories all frozen until restocking.



Spam, Spam, Spam – the ongoing problem.



What constitutes spam is different for everybody. To some of our home users, spam is any email that is of no interest to them. To most business users, who have resigned themselves to the fact that they will receive a certain amount of unwanted but expected

emails, spam is identified as those emails that you get every few days that are selling Viagra, Rolex watches and phishing emails supposedly from your bank.

Most spam filters have no trouble filtering out the likes of Viagra and Rolex and to a lesser extent the phishing emails requesting your bank details etc. What most spam filters do have trouble with is filtering out the emails that you are "not interested in"!

To do this would take a leap in technology and probably a small aerial hard wired to each users brain, so don't hold your breath for this one.

I think that most home users need to be a bit more realistic. If you want to use emails as a method of communications, then you have to expect people to use it to communicate with you. That's not to say you have to put up with the same email sent to you repeatedly every few days. But the reality of the world is, if you buy online and don't opt out of being contacted in the future, you will receive a marketing email some time later. Most people are happy with this, they might even be interested in seeing what else this company has for sale and providing the same email doesn't arrive every two days, would be happy to receive them say, every two weeks or perhaps every month.

Everybody with an email address must surely appear on at least one mailing list and as you are now reading our newsletter, there is a good chance your email address is on our newsletter mail list.

99% of mailing lists are handled automatically due to the large numbers of email addresses involved.

The standard way of removing yourself from receiving further emails is to reply to the email and add the word "Remove" in the title bar or subject line.

There's no point sending a message as this will not be seen by a human, the mailing software will collect the email, see the word "Remove" and take your email address off the list.

Some emails have a link, usually at the bottom, which connect you to their website and allows you to remove your email address that way.

As with all things computer, the goalposts get moved as time goes by. What was good practice last year, has now become ineffective.

We used to recommend you not to click on the "Remove me from your list" option, on the grounds that it lets the spammer know that you are a "live" email address and can be spammed to within an inch of your existence.

This still applies to the likes of Viagra and Rolex as they have software generating millions of email addresses and storing the ones that don't get bounced back i.e. live addresses.

But for the rest, most are genuine companies using automatic email software, just trying to let you know what they have to offer. And let's face it, it works. How many people moan about getting emails from Amazon every 3-4 days. But who is the biggest online retailer... need I say more.

All our suppliers email us every couple of days with any special offers they may have, this is where most of our special offers to our customers come from. So if you are one of the 55 people that took advantage of our super cheap all-in-one printer offer in last month's newsletter, you picked up those bargains because you took the trouble to read our newsletter.

In mid March we sent an email to all our customers warning of a support scam from an Indian company that had caught out a number of our customers because it sounded so genuine.

This was the second email of this type that we had sent in ten years, yet seven of our customers asked us to remove them from our mailing list after receiving it.

So our advice to spam is "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater". For Viagra and Rolex, hold down the Ctrl key while you click to highlight then delete them en-mass. For the rest, if you are sure that you will never read them reply with Remove in the title or click remove me, otherwise, speed-read through the email to see if there is anything of interest, if not click delete.

The few that may have future interest move to a "Pending" folder for when you are not so busy. This not only keeps your inbox tidy, but makes sure you don't miss anything of interest.

In fact a tidy inbox is the secret answer to spam. People see an inbox cluttered with emails, some read, some unread, some put aside to read later and the whole mess overwhelms them. They blame the email from the local DIY store extolling the virtues of their new design of door handles.

If you delete the emails you don't want and sort the rest into folders that you have created named after the sender, or a particular project, then the odd bit of spam will not cause you much concern.

If spam is still too much for you, we can install Kaspersky Internet security for **£45.00** which, among other things, has an excellent spam filter. This price includes removing your old antivirus, which can be the hard part of the job.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/kaspersky.htm

New Hard Drives could mean problems for XP

Tactics used to make new hard drives more efficient could cause problems for Windows XP users. It may mean any new drive bought after next year could be noticeably slower to use on the operating system.

The issue involves the way hard drives are broken down into individual sectors. Until now, it has always been standard for hard drive sectors to be 512 bytes in size. However, not all of each sector is used for storing data. Instead, there is a marker to denote the start of the sector: a space used for codes which are used to check if there is any error with the sector and its contents, and a space between each sector.

The larger the drive, the more sectors there are, and thus the more space unavailable for data storage. While this wasn't a problem in the past, with today's larger drives it has become a significant issue.

512 Byte Sector Limit Scrapped Next Year

The International Disk Drive Equipment and Materials Association (IDEMA), the global body for drive manufacturers, has now agreed that all drives produced after January next year will use sectors which are 4 kilobytes, which is 8 times larger in size than the standard 512 bytes.

The 4 kilobyte sectors have two beneficial effects: first, it cuts down the amount of disk space used simply for spaces between sectors by seven-eighths (87.5%). Second, it allows more space in each sector to be used for error correction codes. This should drastically increase the reliability of drives.

XP Users Could See 10% Dip in Performance

The problem comes from the fact that while Vista and Windows 7 were both designed with 4K sectors in mind, XP was created long before the industry had decided it would eventually be a standard successor to 512 bytes.

XP can work with a 4K sector based drive, but will simply treat it as if it used 512 byte sectors. This will be fine for reading information, but will introduce an adjustment step when writing to make sure the data fits the sectors correctly. Though this will only take an additional 5 milliseconds, that works out as a decrease in speed of up to 10%, which is likely to be a noticeable deterioration, especially with many files stored on the drive.

Later Systems Unaffected

In addition to Vista and Windows 7, all versions of Apple's OS X system from Tiger (released in 2005) onwards will work fine with the new drives. Most modern Linux based systems should be OK and, being open source, it's much easier to upgrade those which aren't.

For XP users, it may be a judgment call as to whether the problem is disruptive enough to justify updating to a later operating system at the same time as getting a new drive.

"How-to" websites

Worldwide Real Time Earthquake Tracking

This site, put together by the U.S. Geological Survey and other contributing agencies, has all sorts of interesting tools and information on tracking earthquakes and related areas.

<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/recenteqsww/>

Search Movie clips

Although still in beta, movieclips.com allows you to search through over 12,000 clips.

You can browse by movie, actor, genre, mood, character, theme, action or setting.

<http://movieclips.com/>

Cooking with.....Bing?

New search engine Bing recently rolled out a new feature - detailed recipe results. Bing pulls from a number of popular recipe websites (delish.com, MyRecipes.com, epicurious.com, etc.) to bring you correlating recipes that you can sift through by holiday, meals, ratings, ingredient, convenience and much more. Just go to www.bing.com and start searching.

<http://www.bing.com/>

"PDFmyURL" converts any webpage into a PDF

I've been using this neat web app to save web pages as PDF's. There are several other web apps like this but this one works well. It saves all (and I do mean all) of what's on the webpage with no weird formatting or breaks. Advanced options allow you to control the page size, orientation, and more.

I use the bookmarklet - drag it to your bookmark toolbar. Click on the bookmarklet when you want to save a webpage. It's that easy.

<http://pdfmyurl.com/>

How to open .docx files

When Microsoft introduced Office 2007, it brought with it some new document formats, among them Docx. If you don't have, want, or use the newest version of Word you might find yourself needing to open a Docx document. Head on over to this Wired How-To article for several alternatives to view those Docx formatted files.

http://howto.wired.com/wiki/Open_Docx_Files

New laptop manufacturer leads the way for value

Foehn & Hirsch laptops have just reached the shores of the UK from the far east, (despite the Swedish sounding name) and Computer Doctors were one of the first to get to try it out.



It turns out to be a really elegant and slim laptop despite the low price.

Most laptops at this price point are thick and heavy but modern manufacturing techniques can be seen at play here.

It has a 15.6" ultra wide screen, dual core Intel processor, 4Gb of

RAM memory, 320Gb hard drive, multifunction DVD writer, 1.3Mp webcam, and multi card reader. Usual array of ports and sockets.

All this and the latest styling for **£439.00** installed with Windows 7 Home Premium, security software and Office suite.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/notebooks.htm

This company has flat screen TV's and other domestic appliances to its name but this is its first effort into the computer market. If this first laptop is anything to go by, the other manufacturers better not even think about resting on their laurels.

Essentials for a small business - "A website"

It always astounds us how many small businesses do not have a website. Often owners of small businesses will use Google and Yell.com to find goods and services for themselves, but never make the connection to their customers looking for them.

Many of our customers will check out a trader's website before they ring for a quote and they filter the list depending on what they find on the website. Its that important!

Some businesses would like a website but think its too expensive and only for the big boys, but you don't have to have one like Sony or Virgin media, just a basic site with up to 5 pages can cost you as little as £400. We know that if you are a one man band £400 represents a good slice of your income, but the extra business that the site will generate will more than cover it. You'll wonder why you never did it before.

Ask your friends and relatives how they shop these days and this should convince you that a website is a must for any business. Give "IC Web People" a call and see what they can do for you. Click the icon for more info.

Computer basics: Show file name extensions

Many people have problems opening email attachments because they don't realize that to view the attachment they need the same program on their PC that originally created the attachment, or a viewer associated with that program.

A file name extension is a set of characters added to the end of a file name that determine which program created it and should open it.

Windows by default, has always hidden the file extensions. Once you get to know a few file extensions it makes life so much easier. e.g. a file called myhouse.jpg will probably be a picture of a house because .JPG is a graphics format. Likewise myCV.doc will be a CV written in Microsoft Word and you will need Word (or a Word viewer) installed on your PC to read it.

Follow these steps to allow Windows to display these file extensions.

Open Folder Options by clicking the **Start** button, clicking **Control Panel**, clicking **Appearance and Personalization**, and then clicking **Folder Options**. (Vista + Win 7)

(To get to the **view** tab in XP, open **My Documents** then on the **Tools** menu click **Folder Options**).

Click the **View** tab, and then, under **Advanced settings**, clear the **Hide extensions for known file types** check box, and then click **OK**.

So with your file extensions on view, the next time someone sends you a file attachment that will not open, you can look at the file extension and see if you have a program that will open it.

If you don't recognize the file extension there are lots of file extension lists on the internet but some may direct you to commercial programs to view your attachment, for a commission, when free viewers are available.

Probably the best know of these is <http://filext.com>

If you still can't open the attachment, you have two options. Either download or purchase the program that created the attachment, or get the person who sent you the attachment to create it in a different format that you can read and send it to you again.

Some programs will read other programs file extensions. For example the free **Open Office** will open Word, Excel & PowerPoint documents (except MS Office 2007).

If all else fails then email us at

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/askthedoc.htm

And we will do our best to locate a free reader or program that will view the attachment .

Ultimate PC Security

The latest routers, security suites, and software patches can help protect your PC against today's ever-more-sophisticated Internet attacks.

These security tools are easy to install, easy to maintain, and provide the average PC user with basic protection against viruses, botnets, Trojans, rootkits, and other types of malware.

Keeping your PC secure goes far beyond convenience — it can protect you against significant financial loss.

But it's not hard to provide a reasonable level of basic security for any PC. For average PC users, the basic rule for keeping PCs secure has not changed — keep it simple, keep it up-to-date.

At its most basic, a PC security system can be viewed as four pillars:

- 1. A router-based firewall**
- 2. An anti-malware software suite**
- 3. A way to stay up-to-date with security patches for both Windows and your applications**
- 4. A secure browser**

These findings are for home users and small businesses; large businesses usually need more elaborate security products.

1. Top choice for router-based firewall

Most individual PC users get a router from their Internet service provider. But if that router needs replacing, or you want to upgrade to a faster or more-secure wireless network, the Linksys WAG160N is the one that we would recommend for ADSL use (telephone line).



<http://www.linksysbycisco.com/AE/en/products/WAG160N>

This is an "N" series router and we can supply these for **£82.49** including an "N" series USB LAN adapter. Installation from **£60.00**. Its not cheap, but it is a class act.

2. Security suites provide adequate protection

Security suites have had a mixed reputation in the past, mostly due to their deleterious effect on PC performance and because some were difficult to uninstall. But these impacts are less of a problem in the latest versions.

The benefit of a security suite for home and small-business users remains the same — one product to purchase, install, and update. A unified interface can also mean the various components are easier to access and configure than they are in a build-it-yourself suite.

Once again, Kaspersky Internet Security 2010 is among this year's top products. It provides solid protection against rootkits, but PC Magazine's review noted the product's higher-than-average list price. We use Kaspersky as an option on our remote support service and consequently can offer it installed by our workshop for just **£45.00** inc vat and removal of your old antivirus.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/kaspersky.htm

Microsoft Security Essentials is a free collection of security tools. It's received generally good comments. The consensus of testing labs such as Virus Bulletin assigns this package average malware detection and removal capabilities. Its best features are easy installation and a simple interface — which will appeal to less-technical PC users.

Those on a budget can put together a custom suite of apps for little or no cost — but then again, maintaining a mix-and-match set of programs is more difficult than installing a single security suite. If you'd rather assemble your own collection of security software, start by checking our download page.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/links.htm

We recommend the following :

Avast Home antivirus (free)

MalwareBytes Antimalware (free)

Ccleaner file and registry cleaner (free)

But don't forget, unlike security suites, these need to be run on a regular basis, we suggest monthly or more often if you regularly find malware.

3. Program updates and patches.

The sites listed below deal with patches for Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office, and non-Microsoft programs. The sites scan PCs and report on which applications need updating:

Secunia: The company's Online Software Inspector (OSI) (http://secunia.com/vulnerability_scanning/online/) runs in your browser, requiring no download or installation.

Secunia's Personal Software Inspector (PSI), by contrast,

is a standalone program that installs on your PC (http://secunia.com/vulnerability_scanning/personal/).

If you find yourself forgetting to run either OSI or PSI after Microsoft releases its latest updates, you can sign up for Secunia's automatic reminders.

Shavlik: The company has migrated its update service away from the Google Desktop (which some analysts considered a privacy risk) and into its own site.

<https://it.shavlik.com/>

As of this writing, the redesigned site can scan your PC for missing patches. New features — still under construction as of this writing — will let Shavlik automatically fix any problems it finds.

Belarc Advisor: This free utility is downloaded from the vendor's site. The program's interface isn't pretty, but Belarc does the job.

http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html

4. Finding the latest on browser vulnerabilities

The many remote attacks on Microsoft's Internet Explorer over the years have pushed PC users to alternate browsers. Even those apps, however, can also have security vulnerabilities.

Secunia's March 11, 2010, Firefox 3.6.x advisory page lists a significant vulnerability in the browser, for example. However, the lack of details concerning the flaw has led some people to suspect there's no real problem. Lucas Adamski of Mozilla Security posted a comment on Secunia's site, stating that Mozilla has received neither details of the vulnerability nor any direct contact from the discoverer.

For added safety when using Firefox, download the donationware NoScript add-on, available from the vendor's site. <http://noscript.net/>

This extension automatically blocks JavaScript and Adobe media files on a site-by-site or source-by-source basis, allowing you to override the blocks as needed. NoScript can also thwart clickjacking attempts and other Web nasties.

Secunia's report on Google's Chrome 4.x lists no unpatched security issues — which would appear to give Chrome a bit of a security edge over Firefox, at least for the moment.

In contrast, Secunia states on its IE 8 page that Microsoft has addressed only four of nine open security holes as of March 11, 2010.

Even if you don't use IE for browsing, though, various important Windows services use Internet Explorer, so you must keep it updated.

Choosing between 32- or 64-bit Windows 7

Ask the Doctor

A customer is facing a purchase decision.

"I'm finding it difficult to decide whether to get a 64- or 32-bit Windows PC. Since I plan on keeping several old peripherals (printer, scanner), I'm tempted to go with 32-bit. I'd appreciate a rundown."

Check with the manufacturers of the old peripherals you mention. See whether 64-bit drivers are available. If they are, you're OK — you can move to 64-bit Windows and still use your older hardware.

If not, then 32-bit Windows is probably a better choice for you. Buy a 32-bit PC and load it with the maximum 4GB of RAM (that's the physical limit for normal 32-bit memory addressing), and you'll be good to go for the next several years.

In any case, remember that the main benefit of 64-bit hardware is access to vast amounts of RAM. Only a relatively small number of users today truly require more than the 4GB supported by 32-bit hardware.

If you want to dig into the topic, see Ehow.com's article, "How to determine if you need more RAM in your computer," http://www.ehow.com/how_5060778_determine-need-ram-computer.html

http://www.ehow.com/how_5060778_determine-need-ram-computer.html

or Microsoft's less-detailed article, "Determine how much RAM you have and how much you need."

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/setup/addmemory.aspx>

The well-regarded TomsHardware.com site also looked in depth at the question of memory size, publishing an article

<http://www.tomshardware.com/reviews/memory-module-upgrade,2264-8.html>

suggesting that 4GB to 6GB of RAM is the sweet spot for most users today — 6GB for those 64-bit systems and kludged 32-bit machines that can support it, and 4GB for standard 32-bit systems.

For most of us, 32-bit hardware and software are still perfectly fine to buy and use!

Last months Competition Winner



Mr Franklin from Northampton was our March winner.

His prize is a free installation of Windows 7 with data backup and on-site setup of his programs and devices when we return his PC.

Mr Franklin's entry was one of only three correct answers which represents an incorrect answer rate of 97%.

So it pays to check our website carefully as all the answers are there.

Mr Franklin also won our external hard drive prize back in November 2009 so it also pays to be persistent.

Don't always do what Microsoft tell you!

It was startlingly obvious from question 3 of last month's competition (shown below) that 75% of our customers would plump for option A).

Q3. If your PC failed to start but showed an error message saying "Please insert system disk", would you : -

A: Put the Windows CD into the CD drive.

B: Open your PC case and make sure that the hard drive is connected securely.

C: Turn the PC off and call the Computer Doctors for advice.

The correct option was C). If you insert the Windows CD and follow the default options, you would install a new version of windows alongside your existing one. This gets Microsoft off the hook as you now have a working version of Windows, but you will not be able to access your existing programs or data (documents pictures etc.).

This error message is still shown in Windows 7 and harks back to the days when you could boot a PC to a DOS prompt with a floppy boot disk. This would allow you to use the limited utilities on the boot disk to try and repair the hard disk on your PC. (Providing you knew the DOS commands and syntax).

I suppose many people would shy away from answer C: "Turn the PC off and call the Computer Doctors for advice". Because they might think that it would incur them in some cost.

Far from it, there are lots of things that can cause this error message and some are as simple as having a non-bootable CD in the drive or a floppy disk in the drive, if you have one. Our tech support can quickly run through a few of the more common options and maybe get you going again.

Unfortunately, you also get this message when your hard drive has failed so its not all good news. But at least you will have tried the obvious thing first just in case.

Of course, if you are one of our remote support customers we will stay with you until we find the problem.

We give free email support to customers and non-customers alike, providing they reside in our area, so just go to: -

<http://www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/askthedoc.htm>

This Months Competition



This is Epson's compact printer, scanner & copier with individual inks. It's a photo printer that's also quite at home printing day to day black and white or colour pages. On photos you can adjust the colour and contrast on screen before you print. Individual cartridges cost just £8.03 from Epson online but office supply companies should be cheaper

Full spec can be seen at:

www.epson-europe.com/internetLive/dctm/content/EU/en_GB/products/all_in_one_products/EU-Product-Model-SX110-EN.inter.jsp

The prize includes professional installation by one of our own engineers and we'll even take away your old printer if you want it scrapped.

So don't put up with that clunky old printer that costs a fortune in ink, any longer.

Don't think that you have no chance of winning. Our competition is only open to people in our catchment area (*see below) so give it a try, you never know, yours might be the only winning entry. You don't have to be an existing customer, so if you don't want to enter, be nice to your friends and help them with the answers.

As usual there are a few easy questions to answer but all the answers are on our website. **Good Luck**

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/competition

If you are telling a friend to enter, make sure that they live in the postcodes below so that we can install at their home.

*NN1 – NN18, NN29, MK19, MK40 – MK46, LE16.

Competition ends 25th April 2010

Contact us

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Unit 12 Blackthorn Ind. Est.
Blackthorn Road
Northampton
NN3 8PT

If this has been passed to you from a friend and you would like your own regular copy, just go to:

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/newsletter



Map to our Northampton Workshop
www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/map.htm

General information & to book a call out

Tel: 01604 411 444 (9-6 Mon-Fri, 9-1 sat)

Sales & On-Line Purchases

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Fax: 0872 115 5359

Email: sales@computerdoctors.co.uk

Shop: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/shop

Technical Support

Free: tech@computerdoctors.co.uk

Remote: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/care

Web: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/askthedoc.htm

Email test Facility:

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