

Special Report:

Computer Security

My Computer and the Internet:



How big of an issue is security for the Internet, broadband and my computer?

You could make the analogy.... you live in the city --- would you leave your front door open? That said, some simple precautions --- the online equivalent of locking your front door. This generally will keep you safe from all but the most determined intruders.

What's the worst that can happen?

- Someone could read, delete or alter files on your computer.
- A hacker could hijack your computer to send e-mail through your own mail program.
- Somebody could crash or erase programs on your computer

How can they do this?

Every computer on the internet has been assigned an IP address (a unique identifying number). Dial-up users get assigned a temporary IP address when they connect online. This makes it difficult for hackers to find the users but not impossible. On the other hand Broadband connections get a more permanent IP address because their "always on". In turn it makes it easier to find these connections. However, most broadband providers use DHCP to issue IP addresses to their customers and are released and renewed with a different unique address in a scheduled event. This prevents users from providing services from their own internet connection. So the short of it is if someone knows your IP address they can possibly gain unauthorized access if not properly protected.

Why would they go after me?

Some hackers go after everybody. They scan for IP addresses and attack everything they find. Other hackers try to steal credit-card or sensitive personal information stored on personal computers.

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Why not just turn off my computer?

If you have a broadband connection turning off your computer won't change the IP address issued to your connection and most hackers use programs to do their work for them. These programs can check your IP address to see when you're on and when to mount an attack. What kind of protection do I need? A firewall, which primarily monitors your internet connection and refuses anything unusual or specifically follows a rule set to guard against suspicious activity on your connection. Firewalls come in hardware and software varieties. Hardware firewalls are boxes that you plug your computer into. Most broadband routers and modems now come with built-in firewall protection.

What can I do to protect myself?

- Get a good anti-virus program and have it scan your computer frequently.
- If you have a PC, turn off the file-sharing function.
- We recommend purchasing a router with a built-in firewall or firewall software
- Also get a good anti-spyware program, some software companies may combine both the anti virus and spyware software.
- It is a good practice to keep up with current security patches and software updates both to the operating system and applications.
- Most importantly familiarize yourself with good security practices, e.g. safe internet browsing,
- Don't keep sensitive data on your computer. Store these files on removable media.
- Don't open unknown email attachments
- Don't run programs of unknown origin
- Disable hidden filename extensions
- Turn off computer or disconnect from network when not in use
- Make regular backups of critical data