

No Rest for the Wicked

There was a time when Fall marked a respite from malicious software. The reason? Kids were back in school and no longer had as much idle time for malicious mischief. In the antivirus world we didn't have summer vacation, we had fall vacation. Fall was a



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time when the antivirus researchers could take a deep breath and relax a bit. Alas, that time is long gone.

A few years ago the landscape shifted. Virus and trojan writing became the battleground of criminals and is now a year-round business. People used to shake their head and wonder why a person would write a virus, but now the motivation is quite clear. Money is the incentive for most all the attacks we see.

There does not need to be valuable data on your computer for it to be of financial value to the criminal element. Oftentimes, a high speed Internet connection is value enough. A connected computer is a source of revenue for the purveyor of spam. One computer can send thousands of spam messages each day. 100,000 computers can send a lot more. The spammers know this, and pay professional programmers to write malicious software, commandeering computers into massive networks to send spam.

As school starts again, there will be new computers and new computer users. One of the most important security lessons is that a new computer's antivirus software is usually a trial version. After a short time it will no longer be updated unless it is paid for. Many people believe they are protected but don't realize that within days after their trial program expires, they are at significantly more risk since their antivirus is no longer updating. Another important thing to realize is that the computer manufacturer rarely installs security software because they believe it is good. Security vendors pay the manufacturer to put their software on new PCs. For a short time Sony was offering to ship new PCs without the extra software if you paid an additional \$50 for the computer. You heard right - pay more money for less software. Sony dropped the idea after consumer outcry, but the fact remains that software included on a new PC is there because the vendor is getting paid to put it there.

So, as the kids go off to school with their new PCs, be sure to remember that a full version of security software will soon be required. A freebie second rate program is rarely a good alternative to a quality piece of security software, so it may be a good idea to set a reminder to coincide with the trial version's expiration.

If you wish to submit questions or comments to "Ask the Expert" please feel free to send them to askeset@eset.com.



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