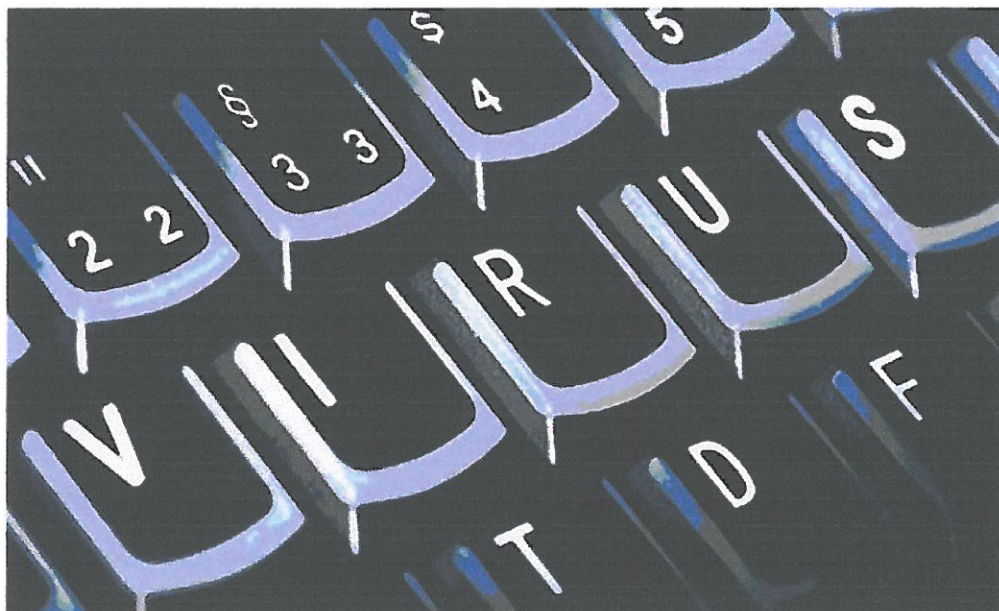


GENERAL HEADQUARTERS
ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR
COMMUNICATIONS, ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS, J6
Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo, Quezon City

CYBERSECURITY BULLETIN

Cybersecurity Bulletin: 2016–11

13 Ways You're Compromising Your Computer



People are constantly screwing up their own computers mostly by ignorance! Sometimes, however, procrastination is the enemy. We put off a computer maintenance task because we don't have time, or tell ourselves that we'll back up our stuff next week instead.

Regardless of where you sit on the ignorant-to-procrastinating scale, let this article remind you of some of the most important things you can do to **stop compromising your computer!**

1. You're Not Backing Up Continuously

One big way to screw up your computer, and by extension yourself, is to back up in some way that's not continuous. Yes, you should be backing up your data continuously, as in virtually nonstop, at least once per minute.

While it's possible to use traditional backup software to back up continuously to an external hard drive or a network drive, it's easier to get started with,

and safer on several levels, to back up continuously with an online backup service. Backblaze, CrashPlan, and Carbonite are few of the online backup services which allow unlimited space at surprisingly affordable prices.

So stop screwing up your computer and start *continuously* backing up to the cloud! Most smartphones have built-in auto-backup capabilities, so be sure to turn those on too!

2. You're Not Updating Your Antivirus Software

Most antivirus software, even free antivirus programs (of which there are plenty), automatically update their *definitions*, the term used to describe the set of instructions the programs use to identify and remove viruses and other malware.

That said, there are sometimes pop-up messages that ask you to do this manually or notices that appear on screen about needing to update the core program before definition updating can continue.

Unfortunately, people screw up all the time by closing these... *without reading them at all!* A message that shows up over and over is usually a good indication that's it's important.

So stop screwing up your computer's ability to fight the bad guys and make sure your antivirus program is updated! Just open the program and look for the "update" button.

3. You're Not Patching Software Right Away

Similar to the not-updating-your-antivirus mistake, putting off those software updates, especially the operating system ones, is another way to screw up your computer.

The majority of software patches these days, especially the ones Microsoft pushes for Windows on Patch Tuesday, correct "security" issues, meaning issues that have been discovered that could allow someone to remotely access your computer!

Once these vulnerabilities in Windows have been discovered, a patch has to be created by the developer (Microsoft) and then installed (by you) on your computer, all before the bad guys figure out how to exploit said vulnerability and start doing damage.

Microsoft's part of this process takes long enough so the *worst thing you can do* is extend that window of opportunity any longer by procrastinating on installing these fixes once provided. Windows Update is probably installing these updates for you automatically but you can check for this, and change the behavior, any time you want. It's the exact same situation with your Mac or Linux computer, your tablet, and your smartphone... just different details. However you're notified that an update is available to iOS, your smartphone software, or your Linux kernel: **promptly apply the update!**

4. You're Not Using Strong Passwords

Passwords that include your name, simple words, 1234, etc., are all "bad" passwords. Information security experts call these types of passwords *weak passwords*. Weak passwords are easy to "crack" with special software. Very weak passwords are even easy enough to guess. If you're not quite sure how great, or not-so-great, your passwords are, make a strong password and use a password manager to store your hard-to-remember passwords, leaving you with just a single, strong password to memorize. There are plenty of free password manager apps, programs, and web services out there.

5. You're Still Running Windows XP

Windows XP was probably Microsoft's most successful product of all time, certainly its most successful and popular operating system. Unfortunately, in April of 2014, Microsoft ended pretty much all support for it, meaning that those important security holes that are patched every month on Patch Tuesday are not being created for Windows XP!

If you're still using Windows XP, then your computer is still vulnerable to all of the security issues that have been found, and corrected in later versions of Windows, since May of 2014!

6. You Still Haven't Updated Windows 8

One easy to way to screw up your Windows 8 computer, especially if you *did* update Windows 8 to Windows 8.1, is to skip that next update to Windows 8.1 Update.

These two updates to Windows 8, *8.1* and *8.1 Update*, are completely free, moderately-sized updates to Windows 8 that fix all sorts of problems. That's great and all, but Microsoft put their collective foot down in April, 2014. This Windows 8.1

Update thing was just another item in Windows Update so if you've been diligent about no. 4, then you're probably in great shape.

UPDATE: Microsoft's newest operating system, Windows 10, is a major, but still completely free, upgrade for all Windows 7 and Windows 8 owners. It'll be a long-term screw up if you don't take advantage of it! *This free upgrade offer expires on July 29, 2016.*

7. You're Downloading the Wrong Stuff

Another very common way to screw up your computer is to download the wrong types of software, filling your computer up with stuff you never wanted, including malware and adware.

As you probably know, there are *tens of thousands*, maybe more, completely free software programs and apps out there. What you may *not* know is that there are different levels of free software. Some are completely free, often called *freeware*, while others are only "sort of" free, like *trialware* programs and *shareware* programs. Some sites trick users by advertising that the download is free when in reality the only thing they're saying is that the actual download *process* is free. What all of this confusion does is help you end up with something other than what you thought you were getting.

8. You've Left Junk Installed...and Probably Running!

A pretty easy way to screw up your computer is by installing, or leaving already-installed, junk software on your computer, the worst of which is the kind that runs in the background all the time. The bulk of the blame for this one is with *your computer maker*. Seriously. Part of the reason some companies can sell their computers at such a low cost is by taking money from software makers to include trial versions of their programs on your brand new computer.

Unfortunately, most people have little to no use for these programs. What the majority of new computer users will do, at most, is just delete the shortcuts to these programs. Out of sight, out of mind.

What some people don't realize is that these programs are *still installed* and wasting space, just hidden from your daily view. Worse yet, some of these programs start up in the background when your computer starts, wasting your system resources and slowing down your computer.

9. You're Letting Needless Files Fill up the Hard Drive

In general, having "stuff" on your computer that doesn't do anything but take up space is not anything to worry about it. When it can be an issue is when the free space on the drive gets too low.

The operating system, Windows for example, needs a certain amount of "working" room so it can temporarily grow if need be. System Restore comes to mind as a feature that you'll be happy to have in an emergency but that won't work if there's not enough free space. To avoid problems, keep 10% of your main drive's total capacity free. Having hundreds or thousands of extra files also makes it harder for your antivirus program to scan your computer and makes defragmenting more difficult.

10. You're Not Defragging On a Regular Basis

To defragment or not to defragment... not usually a question. While it's true that you don't need to defrag if you have a solid state hard drive, defragging a traditional hard drive is a must.

Fragmentation happens naturally as your computer's hard drive writes data all over the place. Having a bit here, and a bit there, makes it harder to *read* that data later, slowing down how quickly your computer can do a lot of things. No, your computer isn't going to crash or explode if you *never* defrag but doing it on a regular basis can most certainly speed up pretty much every aspect of your computer use, especially non-Internet related tasks.

Windows has a built-in defragmentation tool but this is one area where other developers have gone the extra mile, making easier-to-use and more effective tools.

11. You're Not (Physically) Cleaning Your Computer

Not properly cleaning your computer, especially a desktop computer, is an often overlooked maintenance task that could eventually screw up your computer something severe.

Here's what happens: 1) your computer's many fans collect dust and other grime; 2) said dirt and grime build up and slow down the fans; 3) the computer parts cooled by the fans begin to overheat, and; 4) your computer crashes, often *permanently*.

12. You're Putting Off Fixing Problems That You Can Probably Fix Yourself

You may be rolling your eyes a little right now but yes, you can fix your own computer problems! The huge majority of them, anyway. This one has a range of screw-up-ness thanks to the wide variety of consequences that your procrastination due to your fear of DIY computer repair might have on your computer's health.

Most people have been putting up with a problem for days, weeks, or even years, because they didn't think they were smart enough to tackle it or couldn't afford to have someone look at it.

13. You're Not Asking for Help When You Need It

Last, but certainly not least, and very much related to the last big screw up you just read about, is not asking for help when you need it.

Don't feel bad! This is something just about everyone screws up on. If you think you might be able to fix a problem that pops up yourself, you run to your favorite search engine for help. Maybe you ask a friend on Facebook, or Twitter. Maybe your 12 year old is a wiz and fixes everything for you.

All of those things are **great**. Consider yourself lucky that they worked out. What if, on the other hand, you're not that great at even knowing what the problem is so you're not even sure what to search for? What if you don't have a 12-year old computer genius living upstairs? What if none of your social media friends are techie types? Lucky for you, **there are plenty of places to get free computer help!**

In case of any cyber-related incidents, report immediately to the AFP Computer Security Incidents Response Team (AFPCSIIRT), Cyberspace Security Group, CEISSAFP, at AFPTSN 911-6001 local 5873.

Reference:

This was cross posted from:

<http://pcsupport.about.com/od/maintenance/ss/screwing-up-computer.htm#step1> as referenced by CMB, G6, PA Cyber Security Bulletin #59 with minor additions/modifications.