# Midwest Software Specialists, Inc.

## Training and Consulting

## SECURITY:

## How to Protect Your Computer from Outside Threats.

**Dear Jennifer,**

Security Software covers a wide variety of tools to help protect your computer against threats, such as viruses, worms, spyware, adware, scareware and crimeware. Let's start with some definitions of these threats to understand exactly what we are dealing with.

## Type of Threats to your Computer

**Computer virus**- is a computer program that can replicate itself and spread from one computer to another. Some viruses are very harmful and can do significant damage to your computer, while others do nothing beyond reproducing themselves.

**Worm**- is a standalone computer program that replicates itself in order to spread to other computers. Often, it uses a computer network to spread itself. This is due to security shortcomings on the target computer. Unlike a computer virus, it does not need to attach itself to an existing program. Worms almost always cause at least some harm to the network, even if only by consuming bandwidth.

**Spyware**- is a type of malicious software that collects information about users without their knowledge. Spyware can collect almost any type of data, including internet surfing habits and bank and credit card information.

**Adware**-or advertising-supported software, is any software package which automatically renders advertisements. These advertisements can be in the form of a pop-up. They may also be in the user interface of the software or on a screen presented to the user during the installation process. The object of the Adware is to generate revenue for its author. Adware, by itself, is harmless; however, some adware may come with integrated spyware and other privacy-invasive software.

**Scareware**- is a tactic used by criminals convincing users that a virus has infected their computer, then suggesting that they download (and pay for) fake antivirus software to remove. The virus was entirely fictitious.

 **Crimeware-**promotes identity theft in order to access users online accounts at financial services companies to steal funds

## How to protect yourself from these threats: Antivirus, Antispyware and Firewall

Antivirus
Antivirus software is typically included with all types of security applications because it's a must-have for any computer. Besides scanning for and removing viruses, many antivirus software notices suspicious behavior. Typically, antivirus software is designed to block viruses, worms, scareware and Crimeware. Note that you don't want to install two antivirus applications because they can conflict with each other, which can cause system crashes.

Antispyware
Antispyware is security designed to prevent things that antivirus applications may not catch and eliminate. For example, things like spyware and adware can infiltrate through your computer through your web browser. Rather than actively destroying your computer, these threats attempt to secretly monitor your computer to gather and steal personal information, such as usernames, passwords and credit card numbers.

Firewall
A Firewall monitors the data that comes in to and goes out of your computer and blocks items that don't fit the normal flow of traffic. For example, a firewall can be set up so that applications can be installed if they are on an approved list of if you've given permission for it to install. A firewall can also scan existing data to prevent sensitive information from leaving your computer by ensuring that outgoing data meets the predefined set of criteria. It can't prevent all types of viruses and spyware from entering, but it can help prevent actions that seem out of the ordinary.

## Security Assessment- For Windows 7 Users

The first step in making sure your computer is secure is to determine whether or not you have the recommended security software installed to begin with. Fortunately, Windows 7 Action Center is a single location that displays the status of all of your security software. To access this, click Start, Control Panel, System & Security, then click Action Center. Click the security category to expand it. Any items marked "Off"   "Scan Now" or "Currently Not Monitored" should be researched further.

The only reason you might leave something labeled "Currently Not Monitored" is if you're running software that is not compatible with Action Center. For example, if your company has a firewall at the server level and individual computers don't require it, then you can safely leave the firewall setting unmonitored. Items marked "Off" may be installed but not currently operating. To launch these items, or turn them on, right click on them and then select the appropriate option.

The yellow notifications with a "Scan Now" button indicate that a security utility is overdue for a scan of your system. Click the button to launch the software and begin the scan. Anything with a red bar to the left and a "Find a Program Online" button indicates that the software in question is not installed nor detected. If you know that you do have the software installed and you have verified that it is running properly, you can safely click "Turn Off Messages About". The item you're most likely to be altered to is antivirus software, as Window 7 doesn't come with antivirus software preinstalled.

## For Windows XP Users:

Microsoft Security Essentials provides real-time protection for your computer that guards against viruses, spyware, and other malicious software. It is a free download from Microsoft that is simple to install, easy to use, and always kept up to date so you can be assured you are protected by the latest technology. It's easy to tell if your PC is secure - when the indicator light is the color you're green, everything is running fine. It's that simple. Microsoft Security Essentials runs quietly and efficiently in the background.

All the security software in the world won't help you if it's out of date. Most software automatically updates itself. It's a good idea to periodically launch your securities utilities one- by- one and check that they are updating properly.

We hope that you find this information useful. We are always happy to hear from you and assist in advancing your maintenance program.

Best Regards,

*Jennifer*

Jennifer Ohl, M.B.A.
Midwest Software Specialists, Inc.
773-844-4831
Jennifer.ohl@midwestsoft.com
www.midwestsoft.com