



Protect yourself from hackers, crackers and thieves by using a “Net-only” notebook computer

Here are a few easy steps that can prevent a computer catastrophe.



Mortimer

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Two events recently occurred that were “on point” with this month’s topic: protecting your office files from being compromised, damaged or destroyed by online attacks from hackers, crackers, thieves or the deranged. My method is completely foolproof. If you do exactly as I say, your office files will never be compromised, damaged, destroyed or stolen by Net miscreants.

Bottom line first, what I propose you do is set up a notebook computer in your office on your desk, connect it to the Net and use this computer as a “Net-only” machine. Assuming that you have a separate desktop computer, that computer will NEVER be connected to the Internet. As long as it remains discon-

nected from the Net, it can never be attacked and your pleadings, research and case files will remain intact and safe from intruders.

The problem and threat

A few Sundays ago I received a call from a county prosecutor acquaintance of mine. I knew the call was serious because her voice had a distressed tone. She told me that while working online with her notebook computer she was tricked by one of those pop-up ads that looked like a message from Microsoft. (It was the notorious “Anti-Virus XP” virus/message going around.) The pop-up ominously said that her computer was infected with a virus and to “click here” to purchase and download the anti-virus program to get rid of the detected virus.



She did not press the “click here” icon and instead pressed the red “X” that we all know is the universal method for closing a window, box or message. Well, the miscreants had maliciously programmed the virus to install if one pressed the X. You know what happened next. She downloaded and installed the Trojan. She called me because the Trojan had disabled her computer to the point where it was unusable.

The end result is that I had to spend six hours that Sunday evening restoring her computer. She was lucky that the con artists’ goal was to force people to spend \$30 to get their computers working again. These miscreants made \$30 from each victim and luckily, did not want to steal confidential information such as passwords or account numbers.

As with this lawyer friend, the typical lawyer’s office has a personal computer next to his or her desk that the lawyer uses to ply his trade. The lawyer’s computer has case files, pleadings, research and documents that the attorney has accumulated over the years.

The problem is that many plaintiff’s lawyers are not computer savvy. For example, a lawyer might be using a computer that was purchased in 2002 as their main machine. Their life’s work is on this computer.

Consistent with being computer illiterate, these lawyers don’t back up their files, they don’t have firewall or anti-virus programs installed (or the programs are not updated or have expired) and nightmare of nightmares, they are using their “main machines” to access the Internet.

I have seen lawyers in this situation who have lost EVERYTHING because of an Internet attack. They are so white with fear that they look like walking calcium deposits. You see them at Office Depot, desperately looking at anti-virus programs, reading the box to see if the program can recover eight years of lost or destroyed case files, research, pleadings, billings, contact information and office records.

The solution

On the national news, the reporters announced that President-Elect Barack Obama will have a notebook computer on his Oval Office desk. The news reported that Mr. Obama will be the first President to have a computer on the desk in the Oval Office.

I thought that was interesting considering that a notebook computer on the desktop was my solution to protect against Net attacks. Since 1996, I have had notebook computers on the top of my desk. These notebook computers have functioned as my sole access to the Internet. The main reason I have a “Net-only” desktop notebook was to protect my data from being compromised or attacked by any number of ways that miscreants ply their malicious trade. And I do have a lot to protect, considering that on my main computer, which is not connected to the Net, I have files going back to 1988!

The beauty of a Net-only PC is that I have never had to worry about being attacked. This is mainly because the worst

Our copy editor’s PC was recently infected with a malware program, “Anti-Virus 2009;” she got it from an online dictionary. We have MacAfee on that computer, but it failed to detect that the virus had been downloaded. When the AntiVirus 2009 pop-ups started we turned to MacAfee, whose own Web site discusses this malware and claims that it will annihilate it. MacAfee failed to even find the malware despite a complete scan. So we turned to a *free* download of another highly-rated program, Malwarebyte’s Anti-Malware (www.malwarebytes.org). It did the trick, deleting the files and repairing the Windows registry. Virus gone. Cost zero. — *Richard Neubauer, Publisher*

that could happen to me is that I might have to reformat my hard disk and reinstall my operating system. I am not at risk because the only information I have on my Net-only notebook is duplicate case files that are also located in other places, such as in backup files or on hard disks.

Technique and tips on setting up a Net-only machine

• *Notebook Computer*

You don’t need the fastest or latest notebook computer to function as your Net-only computer. This is because you will not be asking the computer to do anything more than accessing the Net. Net speed (such as downloading files) does not depend on your notebook’s memory, cache, video card or hard disk size. How fast you can surf the Net mostly depends on the speed of your DSL or broadband connection. So, it is OK to use a three-to five-year-old notebook computer as your Net-only PC.

• *USB 2.0 Ports*

You will want USB 2.0 ports on your Net-only machine. This is because USB 1.1 ports are painfully slow when transferring files to a memory chip (USB 2.0 is 40 times faster than USB 1.1.) You also want fast transfer times when synchronizing files, contacts or e-mails to and from a Blackberry smartphone, for example. Most notebook computers from 2003 or 2004 and forward have USB 2.0 high-speed ports.

• *Lock*

If you don’t have a lock on your office door or you don’t lock your office door when you go to lunch, for example, you will need a way to secure your notebook to the desk. Lucky for you, 99 percent of notebook computers have a generic “Kensington Security Slot.” Many lawyers don’t even know that this slot is on their notebook, but take a look, it’s there.

The Kensington Security Slot is used in conjunction with a lock that



you can buy from Kensington. The lock enables you to easily lock your notebook computer to your desk. This will deter thieves who are known to cruise office floors looking for notebooks or other valuable electronics to steal. You can go to www.kensington.com and see the locks I am talking about. (Note: lest you think I am being paranoid, I know of three lawyers over the years who have had their notebook computers stolen from their offices!)

• **Card reader and chips**

You need a USB card reader and some memory chips. You use the memory chips to transfer files to and from your Net-only machine and your main desktop computer.

For example, on a federal case, assume you have prepared a pleading for ECF filing (filing via the Internet.) The pleading is sitting on your desktop computer's hard disk. You need a way to transfer it from your desktop PC to your Net-only notebook so that you can e-file the document.

Enter the memory chip. You will transfer a copy of the pleading on to the memory chip, insert that chip into the card reader that is connected to the notebook computer and then e-file the document directly from the chip. How cool is that? Very!

• **Net Connection**

You need DSL or broadband access to the Net. Do not use 56K dial-up service. That is too slow and your documents may not be filed on time.

Bonus Warning: Here is an example of the perils of using a slow, outdated modem connection. Under the federal rules, where all court cases are now handled electronically, a filing deadline means that the filing must be completed by the deadline. The deadline does NOT mean that you simply have to start e-filing by the deadline.

Some federal filings are 3 MB in size or more. Can you imagine how long it would take to file a 3 MB document at a 52K connection speed? It might take a



half-hour to file a pleading where on a DSL or faster connection it might only take 60 seconds. Federal judges are on record that you use a 56K modem at your peril.

• **Files on your Net-only machine**

It is OK to have files and documents on your Net-only machine, but make sure that they are duplicates of what you have already backed up. In other words, if the files are compromised, deleted or destroyed, there is no loss because the information is duplicated elsewhere and protected against loss.

• **Anti-virus and firewall protection**

Just because your notebook will be a Net-only machine does NOT mean you can dispense with security software. You still need a good firewall and anti-virus program. For those who don't know, "firewall" software makes your connection to the Internet invisible. What hackers and crackers do is sniff around the Internet looking for "open connections." An open connection is where the computer user that has connected to the Net has an open port through which miscreants can enter the computer, sniff around and see if there is anything worth stealing, such as financial information.

I have used many firewall and anti-virus programs. I used to use Norton, but their firewall program sucks. It slows down your computer to a crawl. For the past seven years or so I have used Zone Alarm. I recommend it. I

would pass on their more expensive offerings. Just go with the anti-virus and firewall program, currently priced at \$19.95. You can't get cheaper than that. Go to <http://www.zonealarm.com> to check it out.

• **Porn!!!**

If you intend to ever use your Net-only machine for court, depositions or client meetings, never ever visit porn sites, or for that matter, any site that might be embarrassing. Never, ever download porn or offensive material on to your Net-only machine. Never, ever download and install any screen saver whatsoever.

Horror Story: Two California judges in separate incidents were kicked off the bench for accessing porn sites on computers located in chambers. Accessing such sites on county-owned computers was not permitted.

An attorney at trial on a sexual harassment case had his spiffy Net-only notebook computer set up on counsel table. While giving his closing argument his screen saver activated. Not that big a deal, except it was a porn screen saver, complete with sounds of moaning women. I won't describe it further. Moral of this horror story: DON'T ACCESS PORN SITES ON YOUR NET-ONLY MACHINE.

• **Final Tip:** Once you have your Net-only notebook set up, disconnect your main desktop computer from the Net. You should not even have a network cable connected. If you need to update programs or files, it is OK to connect to the Net, quickly perform the updates and then yank the network cable from the wall.

If you are going to perform updates, make sure you have security software installed. It would be just your bad luck that during the 30 minutes you are connected to the Net, some miscreant finds you and attacks your computer. So don't connect to the Net naked. Install security software and keep it updated, even if you only connect your "non-Net" machine to the Internet once a year.



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Conclusion

A Net-only notebook computer on your desktop looks spiffy, is convenient and will impress your clients because you appear to be someone who is up-to-date on using technology. All these benefits aside, you can relax while on the Net because if you ever get attacked, nothing much will happen to you. Your life's work will be safe because the computer containing that information is not accessible by anyone except you.

As a testament to the soundness of my Net-only notebook idea, I have been on the Net since 1996. I have never, ever been a victim of an attack. A few times my anti-virus software has caught files containing viruses, but the miscreants did not get past my protection.

Since 1996, I have never suffered damage to my Net-only machine. Of course, if I had been a victim of an attack, because my Net-only notebook was NOT the sole repository of documents, I would have at most suffered the incon-

venience of having to reformat my hard disk and to reinstall my operating system.

Follow this advice and your confidential information will never be compromised.

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