

Radio Days – 2014-03-08

Tip of the Week – Changed Settings

I had a call from a client during the week to tell me that she could not send emails. She was able to receive emails and she was able to get on to the internet so the problem was obviously with the settings in her email program. I had set up her email program only about a month ago so I was surprised to find that she could no longer send emails. Something had changed in her settings in the intervening weeks.

I went out and checked her settings against those on her ISP's website for both sending and receiving emails. According to this website her settings were correct, but sending emails was beyond her email program. This was where I was going to need her ISP's technical support so a quick phone call later and her ISP's tech support person was moving my client's mouse around and changing settings with gay abandon.

Once these settings had been changed it was time to do the testing.

Step One: send an email. This went off without a hitch: the email was gone and the Outbox was empty. A quick mouse-click later and the test email was in her Inbox.

Step Two: reply to this first email. Again, this went off without a hitch and the email was winging its way back to my client's Inbox. Problem solved!

Summary

Just because your email works then stops working, despite having the recommended settings in your email program which happen to be those on your ISP's website, it does not mean that the problem is your fault. Sometimes people (other people, that is) make mistakes and you have to wear the consequences!

Avoiding Hitchhikers

It appears that there are more and more programs which are secretly installing unwanted programs (sometimes called PUPs for Potentially Unwanted Programs) during what purports to be a simple installation. This happened twice during the week: once to a listener and once to me.

Foxit Reader

During the week I had an email from a long-term listener. In this email he states that:

You recommend Foxit Reader as a PDF reader, it is a program I have used happily for a couple of years now. Secunia PSI is another program you recommend that I use. This morning I did my customary AVG scan and followed that with a Secunia PSI run. Secunia found that Foxit Reader needed updating.

It turned out there is a new version of Foxit Reader Free which I proceeded to download and install. CAUTION don't accept the default install mode, as I did (I find, being semi-computer-literate, that some of the nasty questions that custom installs ask I have to end up guessing the answer to). Anyway, to cut this epistle short, it now seems that Foxit free software is bundled with a browser hijacker, "Conduit search", which changes your home page, introduces a new toolbar and search engine, plus presumably invites in all sorts of unwanted wigwam-for-a-goose's-bridle sellers. Uninstalling Foxit doesn't help matters as the hijacker stays. If you try to change your home page back to my default home page, you get a home page with its google search crippled with an undeletable "Conduit search" entry in the search text box.

I was unaware that Foxit Reader had this sort of hijacker installing itself so I rang Bob and asked where he had downloaded Foxit reader from. I was expecting that he had downloaded

it from one of the many websites which copy programs then attach their own malware and pass the whole package on to unsuspecting users like Bob.

He checked his use of a search engine and sent me another email which showed that he had downloaded Foxit Reader from the Foxit website listed below. After more research than most people manage in a lifetime Bob discovered that the Foxit Reader installer has, and I quote:

When it comes to the installation you are presented with two options:

- *Express (recommended)*
- *Custom (advanced)*

*If you select the Express mode, Conduit Search and Search Protect **will** be installed. If you choose the Custom mode there is an option box which allows you to opt out of installing Search Protect / Conduit Search. This time round I chose the Custom mode and opted out of the Search Protect / Conduit Search. The installation thereafter was simple. In essence, if you want a standard set-up, you can just accept the defaults from then on. This form of installation seems to have worked fine: I have Foxit as my default PDF reader the same as I had with the earlier version of Foxit. No hijack problems this time round.*

But in my case there is a legacy from my original mistake in allowing the browser hijacking software to piggy-back, that being that the google search feature of Firefox's default home page still has an immovable "Conduit Search" entry in the search text box. However, I have been able to change my home page to google, which seems to work fine, "touch wood".

So for me a lesson - be careful of piggy-backs that can come with free software, even from would-be reputable suppliers. It would be interesting to know if the paid versions of Foxit software carry the same piggy-backing hijacker.

I was unaware that Conduit Search was installed during a standard install of Foxit Reader so I am grateful to Bob for this information. In this email Bob also included a link to an article on Gizmo's Tech Support Alert website. This article also includes more information about OpenCandy (the company which installs Conduit Search) and the programs which it includes during the installation of other programs. I found this article to be an excellent introduction to the whole idea of unwanted installations.

You may well find that Gizmo's website is an excellent source of reliable information. I congratulate Bob on this find. This would be an interesting article all by itself.

Removing Unwanted Programs

There is much information on the internet about how to uninstall various programs. If you have difficulty removing a program please check this resource. I checked for references for removing Conduit Search and found that there was more information than I needed.

One thing that I noticed, and not for the first time, is that there are many websites where people ask questions and the answers are given by people who usually know what they are talking about. You may have to find a number of these sites before you are able to find the one answer which works for you, but that is the nature of research.

This is the process that I use when I need to know how to do something. It is often a matter of trial and error, but in the end I achieve the result that I want. If you are prepared to make the effort to find this sort of information you will find that you can achieve unexpected results.

The Surprise

Like Bob, I ran Secunia PSI and noticed that Foxit Reader had an update. When I updated it there was no option to do a custom install so I just changed a couple of options. I have

rebooted my computer and run all my web browsers without getting the dreaded Conduit Search window so Foxit seems to have removed this option from its program when installing.

Does this mean that enough people have complained, and complained successfully?

Copernic Desktop Search

My favourite program for searching the contents of text files on my computer is Copernic Desktop Search. When I went to use this excellent program I found that it has recently been updated. I went to download the update and was taken to the *cnet* website where a large button invited me to download the latest version of Copernic Desktop Search. All went well until I discovered that I was expected to install Conduit Search as well as the program that I had intended to install.

This is the program that Bob had warned me about and I was grateful for his warning!

I cancelled that installation and went back to the Copernic website to see where I had gone wrong. Again I was taken to the page from which I copied this segment. It was only after a lot of searching (see the screen shot above for what I saw) that I noticed that there was a little line which stated ***Direct Download Link***. Clicking this gave me the result that I wanted so I thanked Bob for pointing me away from installing Conduit Search.

If you ever get taken to the *cnet* website to download a program please use the very small *Direct Download Link* instead of the enormous ***Download Now*** button. It will save you a massive amount of trouble later.

Summary

This is a good time to RTFS (Read The Flaming Screen!) when downloading or installing a program. You may be surprised by what you are expected to accept without realising it. Perhaps Bob's advice to take the custom install, even though it may be bewildering at first, is best in the long run.

Further Information

Foxit Reader	www.foxitsoftware.com
Link to article	www.bit.ly/1igK5F7
Gizmo's website	www.techsupportalert.com
Copernic Desktop Search	www.copernic.com

