

Radio Days – 2014-04-12

Tip of the Week – Heartbleed

Some of you may have heard of a problem where supposedly-secure websites have been left open to hackers. This problem has been called *Heartbleed*. It is a flaw which has produced this effect, but it is, as far as I can determine, limited to a number of small websites. These websites all use an open-source implementation of the SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) which has had a major bug for the last two years.

Major websites, like your bank's, appear to be using an industrial-strength implementation of SSL so that this is not a problem. This means that, if you stick to well-run websites (and I wish that I could define that term properly), you will have no problem with any sort of problem.

As always, though, if you have been paying for anything, over the internet or in person, with a credit or debit card you should still be checking your bank accounts and their transactions carefully. There are all sorts of ways that the unscrupulous have of getting your money into their account.

Some of these ways are almost impossible to detect. One of the most important things to look for is a salesperson who moves your card out of your sight, even if only for a few seconds. This can be enough to take a copy of your card so that it can be used to make purchases from your account without your permission.

Warnings

There are many warnings about the Heartbleed bug on the internet. I do not have the knowledge to be able to assess them so this is a summary.

- The problem could be extremely serious. Sites like www.yahoo.com report that they were vulnerable to the Heartbleed but that they have now patched their servers.
- Some people state that, because this bug only affects Open SSL, it cannot affect your bank and the other well-run sites because they use commercial web servers to deliver your web pages.

I hope to have a more comprehensive account for you next week.

Beware That Pesky Salesman

Sometimes a salesman or saleswoman can be just that little bit too helpful and sell you all sorts of things that you do not need, or even want. This talk is my attempt to help you arm yourself against the blandishments of an army of people who want, or need, to sell you something that will help them more than it helps you.

This all came about because a new client did not know enough to tell a salesperson when to stop. His first visit to the shop produced a computer and things went rapidly downhill from there.

This is his story.

Windows 8

The first thing that he noticed when he unpacked his computer at home was that his new computer had Windows 8. He bought a new computer because he was told that Windows XP would expire soon and he could not afford to be without email and internet access.

This is the first "slight untruth" that he was told. Windows XP will not expire soon: all that will happen is that Microsoft will stop support for Windows XP. This means that there will be no more updates for Windows XP and that MSE (Microsoft Security Essentials: the free anti-

virus program from Microsoft) will not have database updates for Windows XP but that Windows XP will still work. Also, there are free anti-virus programs which are still available for Windows XP so you do not need to stick with MSE.

For more details about support for Windows XP please see last week's article.

Windows 7

Because my client did not like the Metro interface screen for Windows 8 he bought a copy of Windows 7 online. The promised disc did not appear so he got a copy from another source but still had the installation key from his online purchase so this was legal.

I am not sure just what the cost of Windows 7 was but it would have been at least \$150, perhaps even as much as \$250.

I installed a free program which I downloaded from the web which gave him the advantages of the Windows 7 interface with all the many advantages of Windows 8. Yes, I have bagged Windows 8 in the past but more and more I am beginning to realise that, in many ways under the hood, Windows 8 is better than Windows 7, so there are advantages to Windows 8 but they are obscured by the massive problem of the interface. If there is one company which I would expect to realise the importance of a computer program's interface I would expect that it would be Microsoft. Look at the amount of trouble they went to getting the new ribbon interface for Word and the other Office programs working well.

That program? Classic Shell! And it is free! As usual, its address is shown at the end of this document.

Email

One of my client's main concerns is getting emails. Emails are his lifeblood as they keep him attached to his beloved football club and to all sorts of other things which are important to him. He was hoping to keep Outlook Express (which comes free with Windows XP and is, in my opinion, one of the better email programs) but was disappointed to hear from that pesky salesman that Outlook Express has been discontinued.

When I told him that the whole Outlook Express team had been disbanded and its members sent to other parts of the vast Microsoft empire he was almost prepared for such devastating news. He had believed the pesky salesman who told him that the only option for emails on Windows 8 was Outlook (no relation to Outlook Express).

Again he forked out for Outlook, because the salesman told him that it was his only option. I installed it for him and got his emails working so he was happy that they were all coming in at a normal speed. At least it is working now, he muttered under his breath.

I did not tell my client that there is an excellent free email program which can be downloaded from the internet and does as good a job as Outlook. It is Mozilla Thunderbird, and you can find its website at the end of this document. Mozilla Thunderbird works in a similar fashion to Outlook so, if you know one, you can find your way around the other with ease.

If you are looking for an excellent free email program then Thunderbird could be just what the ants wear for pants.

Anti-Virus

Like far too many new computers nowadays, my client's computer came with many unwanted programs. These unwanted programs, which are collectively known as *bloatware*, are placed on new computers because the profit margin for the computer's manufacturer is very small and the makers of these programs pay to have their programs placed on as many computers as possible.

There are many examples of bloatware. A frequent example of bloatware is a three-month trial of an anti-virus program which the manufacturer then hopes, or expects, to be purchased at the end of the three-month trial. This is obviously a profitable course for the manufacturer of the anti-virus program because they would stop doing it if it were not still profitable.

It is a pain for you because you have to uninstall the trial version of an anti-virus program then install the anti-virus program of your choice. The other option is to wait until the end of the trial period then pay for the full version. My main concern with this option is that you do not always get the best program for your needs.

This is what happened with my client. He had had a bad experience with the trial anti-virus program which was installed on his computer so I downloaded and installed Avast, which is currently my favourite free anti-virus program. Then, after his computer was secured with an anti-virus program I uninstalled the unwanted trial anti-virus program.

Recommendation

While it is, obviously, easiest to accept the blandishments of the computer salesman, this may not be the best option for you. If you do some simple research before you start looking for a new computer you could, if you were like my client, save yourself some hundreds of dollars. This amount would buy you an excellent colour laser printer or a night or two on the town.

This research, of course, would take some time and effort. A good place to start is by asking friends whose computer needs are similar to yours. The main point is to be sure that you know what you want from your new computer. Many people nowadays just need internet access with emails and a way to print photos which have been sent by family or friends.

A simple, low-priced computer would be all that you need to do these tasks. You do not need to be impressed by a computer salesperson's knowledge, or lack of knowledge, to buy more computer than you need.

For most people, the most basic computer in the range will have all the power that they need.

Further Information

Classic Shell www.classicshell.net

Thunderbird www.mozilla.org/thunderbird

Avast www.avast.com