

eNoculation

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Shortly after the "I Love You" virus shut down computers all over the world, The Wall Street Journal published an editorial titled, "Love Bug Victims Don't Want the Cure." The gist of the piece was that folks actually enjoy these disruptions to the routine and that it is especially good for companies that market virus software. Their share prices go through the roof each time there is an outbreak.

Such a view is perhaps too cynical for most of us. Probably, most people would just as soon be spared the excitement, thank you very much. So for the rest of us here are a few tips on how to play it safe in cyberspace.

- **Purchase and use an anti-virus program.** The two best known are Norton AntiVirus and McAfee VirusScan. Both of these programs are updated constantly and the updater files are on the manufacturers' web sites for free download. Update your software as often as you can — at least every 90 days. About 250 new viruses are discovered every week. Unless you update your software continuously, you are liable to be caught by a new strain. After updating the software, do a complete scan of your hard drive. If you find anything, you need to scan and repair all your floppy disks, zip disks and servers as well to avoid being re-infected.
- **Resist the urge to double-click.** Never open an attachment that you are not expecting regardless of who it is from. Viruses are programs that wreak their havoc when they are run. In spite of what you may have heard, you cannot get a computer virus simply by opening an email message unless your email program opens attachments automatically when you open the message. Most do not. If the attached file ends in exe or vbs be especially careful. These are executable files and can easily contain viruses. When in doubt, throw it out.
- **Put Word on notice.** Turn on macro protection in Microsoft Word. If you are using Microsoft Word, select "Options" from the "Tools" menu. Then click the tab that says "General" and turn "Macro Virus Protection" on by checking the box. This will cause Word to warn you if you open a Word document that contains a macro. Not all macros are bad, but if you are not sure you can disable the macro when the document opens.
- **Round up the usual suspects.** Scan every file you receive by email or download from the Internet for viruses. This is a pain and most of you will never do it. But it is a good idea nonetheless.
- **Run [Backups] for your life.** Backup your work every day and use alternate backup disks so that you can go back a week or two if you need to. The "I Love You" virus destroyed every jpeg graphic file and every mp3 music file on a computer's hard disk. But it could have just as easily destroyed every Word file or Excel file. If you don't have good backups you could lose your most important work. Backups protect you not only from viruses but also from hardware failure as well. Remember, the average computer hard drive will fail within two years. Make a backup now.

Computers are neither mysterious nor magical. They are a tool to get things done just like a car or a filing cabinet. But like a car you need to check the oil now and then and like a filing cabinet, one needs to take appropriate precautions to protect it and its contents. The Internet has taken your computer from the relative safety of your office and sent it out into the big wide world. Most of the other computers it meets will be friendly, a few will be hostile. To maintain the integrity of your data you need to approach the problem like you would any other risk. Although you can't reduce the risk of having a problem to zero, you can, by using some

common sense rules, reduce the likelihood of having problems with your PC.

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