

Beefing up PC security at small businesses

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To Karen Unger, there's no such thing as too much online security.

All the PCs at American Document Management have TrendMicro software installed to protect against viruses, worms and other malicious software that might come in over the Internet. But as an added layer of security, Unger's Internet service provider and Web host, Host.Net, provides her a variety of similar protective services.

Too much protection? Not at all, she said.

"You can never be too secure," said Unger, CEO of the Fort Lauderdale document storage and litigation support company. "Having software on my computers and offered through my ISP just keeps the business that much safer."

Consumers and small business owners are being bombarded with ads and offers for security features from major ISPs. As competition heats up to land new subscribers, AOL, MSN, NetZero and Earthlink, among others, are making free virus, spam and pop-up ad protection available as a lure to existing and prospective customers.

While the idea of using protection from the ISP is laudable and often free, just having the software on one machine isn't enough, experts say. Each computer -- or a company's network server -- must have software installed to protect against malware, or malicious software. And the protective software must be frequently updated -- if not daily, then at least weekly.

Some experts advise against using any free protective applications from an ISP that must be downloaded and installed on the computer, especially if the computer already has from the likes of Norton, McAfee or Trend Micro loaded. Trying to use multiple anti-virus or firewall software can create conflicts on the computer or network, causing the PC or other programs to run poorly or not at all.

Unger's ISP at home, Comcast Cable, offers spyware protection, a firewall, pop-up blockers and parental controls. But Unger doesn't use the service, "It's not worth the potential conflicts to install both."

American Document's layered approach to security is not uncommon. In fact, more companies are calling for greater Internet security, said Jeff Davis, president of Host.Net, based in Boca Raton. Last fall, the company partnered with ProtectPoint, a Fort Lauderdale network security firm, to offer greater security for its Web hosting and broadband customers.

Host.net now provides firewall, intrusion detection, anti-virus and anti-spam security for the Web sites and e-mail accounts it hosts. Still, Davis admitted his service is not enough. Since his services are not installed on his clients' PCs, he recommends each of their PCs have protective software put on the machine and updated. Small businesses need a multi-tier approach, "just like the big boys do," said Darren Miller, president of ParaLogic LLC, the Plantation IT security firm that consulted with Unger on her in-depth method of computer protection.

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