

Steps to keep viruses, worms and Trojan horses at bay

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Viruses infiltrate by stealth, infect, multiply and then hitch a ride on to the next host.

Worms arrive as an infection also, but can slither along independently to the next place of mayhem.

And Trojan horses lull you into believing that they are either a beneficial service or the solution to a problem that will not exist unless you welcome them in.

Being felled by a sucker punch from any one – or combination – of those three cyber instruments of mischief, malevolence and malefaction is the computing equivalent of turning your back for 30 seconds on a briefcase containing your passport, ID, credit cards, bank account numbers and passwords, family savings in cash, entire medical history, and intimate data.

Infection by computer virus is at best an infuriating inconvenience, and at worst a pernicious, parasitical crime of theft, fraud, or even worse. Michael Gazeley, of Network Box, notes pointedly that small businesses that hide behind the defence that only they are inconvenienced in the event of a cyber-attack are deluding themselves: cyber-criminals can hijack pre-invaded computers and networks of computers to act as repositories for child pornography

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without the owners noticing. It can seem a relatively small affair – after all, nobody gets hurt, nobody dies, just like identity theft – until it happens to you.

It doesn't have to happen to you. All you have to do is:

DON'T

- **Assume you can click on anything**

Such as when an internet advertisement or window spontaneously informs you that your computer is infected and only the unique plug-in behind their click will solve it.

Or getting so bored of clicking on successive boxes that you keep clicking "OK" without reading the bit about the additional monitoring programs it's about to install.

- **Open e-mail attachments**

Unless they're from someone you

know and that someone does not regularly complain that his computer is acting funny again.

- **Ignore software updates**

Bullet-biting time for those of us who resent frivolous software "upgrades" that frazzle our iPhones and force us to buy the new model – but the principle is absolute, even if it does apply far more to Microsoft than to Mac.

- **Pirate software, music and/or movies**

Or if you do, don't expect any sympathy if you don't know how to spot a virus headed your way.

- **Download infected software**

Always make sure you're downloading the software from a reliable source and, while installing it, you're reading all prompts about what the program is putting on your computer.

- **Think you're smarter than the average bear**

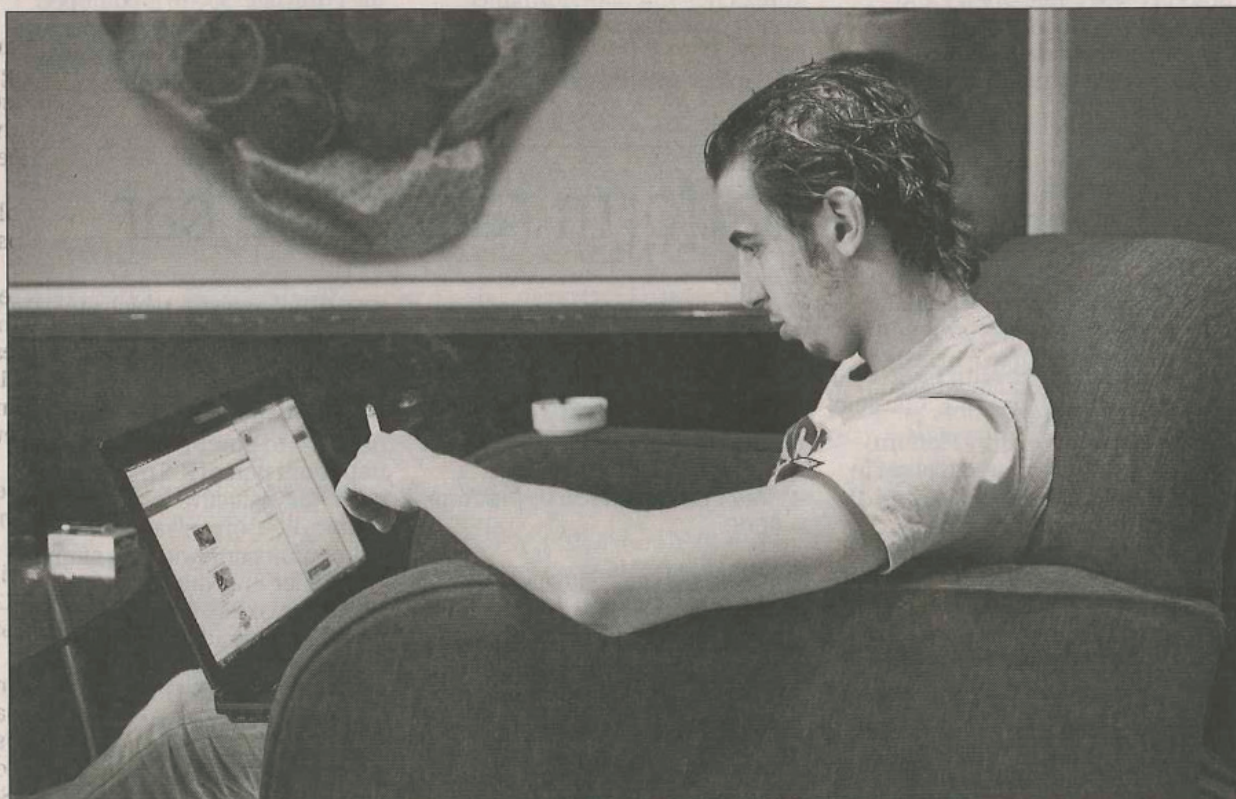
Even the smartest guys in the room have their moments of absent-mindedness. It only takes one to let through the "little monster".

DO

- **Love your firewall**

- **Run antispyware software**

- **Trust nobody – including yourself**



Adhering to a few safety measures should keep your computer free of viruses. Photo: The New York Times