GRYPHON COMPUTER SUPPORT SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2017

We are now settled into our new base in Ruan Minor, Cornwall. Whilst we can no longer provide on-site support for clients in North Somerset and Bristol (we do on the Lizard, however), we can still provide our old customers with telephone and remote support. We also plan to continue to issue regular newsletters containing a mix of virus warnings, PC security advice and general news about developments in the PC market. If you no longer wish to be included please let us know.

Ransomware attacks continue to increase. May saw another major attack. Whilst, it targeted organisations in Eastern Europe, a few UK based companies seem to have been affected. Unfortunately, these targeted attacks make the headlines but in doing so tend to mask the fact that ransomware attacks are very common and affect ordinary PC users all the time.

Indeed, quite a few of our customers have been infected by them over the years. The virus encrypts your hard drive meaning that you cannot access documents or photos etc. Generally, the only solution is to wipe your hard drive and reload Windows. It will mean that, if you did not have a backup, you will lose everything, including photos, documents, music, videos etc. We have had a pub who lost their accounts, staff rotas and payroll spreadsheets, several individuals who lost all their family photos and documents and two medium sized companies whose business was disrupted for two days whilst their backups were restored and systems checked for more viruses. These ransomware attacks can hit anyone, at any time.

The NHS, local councils, Government departments and scores of big companies have all been targeted by 'ransomware' viruses in the past, and many were badly affected. In many cases, it was their own fault. Those affected did not update Windows regularly, install and update effective anti-virus software or train staff to detect the tell-tale signs of attack. Those that escaped relatively unscathed from the attack did so because they had very recent backups.

Worryingly, ransomware type viruses have migrated to the Mac operating system, with a few owners being caught out because they thought Macs were not susceptible to virus attacks. Whilst that was the case for many years, more viruses are being written to attack Macs. These days, a good anti-virus package is just as important on a Mac as a PC.

How do I protect myself?

1. Backup regularly, and do not leave the backup drive plugged into the PC (if you do, your backup will be encrypted too).

2. Most of the anti-virus publishers are very quick to update their anti-virus software. It is very important that you make sure your anti-virus package is up to date and able to protect you from ransomware. We continue to recommend Bullguard or Norton anti-virus products. Remember, you get what you pay for – the free packages only offer very basic protection. The one exception to that is Malwarebytes, a free anti-malware package which we recommend as a 'back stop' to your main anti-virus.

3. You should also regularly check that Windows is up to date by going into Settings (Control Panel, if you are still on Windows 7), and then in Updates.

4. Train your staff or family to recognise potential viruses. Most ransomware is spread via email. You may get a very convincing email asking you to open an attachment containing an invoice, delivery note or letter. The rule is if you are not expecting it DON'T open it. If you

absolutely must open it (you are uncertain whether it's genuine or your curiosity overwhelms you) then do so on your phone or tablet, not PC. They are less likely to be affected by ransomware viruses.

Telephone scams are still very common and are becoming more and more sophisticated. BT and Sky now offer services which filter out these unwanted calls, making life is bit quieter and safer. If you get a phone call from anyone telling you your PC is infected by a virus, or that you need to change some Internet settings etc. it is likely to be a scam. Don't let them access your PC remotely, simply put the phone down. If you are unsure then contact us and we will check your PC over.

Email scams continue to plague us all. A new one was shared by a client on Facebook where you get an email from 'BT' offering a free upgrade to Internet Security. When you follow the link it asks you to enter your bank details etc. Clearly, a scam. The link may also lead to a virus infected page so it's wise to run a virus scan. Following any links contained in unexpected emails is always risky.

The PC and laptop market continues to be very competitive. However, because of the fall in the Pound due to the Brexit vote, prices are higher. A good Intel i5 based laptop will cost between £449 and £499. As far as laptops are concerned, we always recommend avoiding the bottom end of the market as they tend to be underpowered and poorly built.

Traditional desktop PCs continue to be popular. Our advice is always to spend as much as you can afford and buy a PC with the fastest processor, the most memory and the largest monitor you can. 'All in One' designs are excellent for saving space and cutting down on wires but they are more expensive and more difficult to upgrade.

Whilst PCs can often go on for years, their average life expectancy is around 5 years. Anything above that is a bonus. Bear in mind, though, that mechanical hard drives will only last for so long and have a habit of failing at the most inconvenient moment. As your PC gets older, it becomes even more important to back-up regularly. Solid state hard (SSD) drives are becoming cheaper, more practical and offer a good upgrade path but their long-term reliability is a bit of an unknown.

We are often asked whether Macs are better than Windows PCs. The answer, generally, is yes. However, you will pay between twice and three time more for a Mac than you will for a PC. If you are only going to send or receive email or browse the web then a PC is more cost effective. Bear in mind, as well, that software you run on a PC is unlikely to run on a Mac, and visa-versa. Changing from a PC to a Mac, therefore, generally means buying new software. A lot of people are now using iPads or Android tablets to read email and browse the web as they are often easier to use and are less susceptible to viruses (although that may well change in the future). iPads are expensive but do tend to be better than Android based tablets.

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