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THE INDUSTRY'S DIGITAL LEADER

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By Fred Fischer

Is Your POS and Computer System Secure?

There has been much written about retail store computer security issues. Many existing or newly sold POS systems feature a minimal computer security package. Too many packages include no firewalls at all. A router that you can buy in the local electronics store is not the solution for a retail store and is usually not a firewall.

How do you know if you have a firewall/router that meets the standards for a retail business and is processing credit cards? If you are not paying for an annual subscription service as part of your firewall, most likely you are at much more risk. If the price of the device is under $200, buyer beware,

The bad guys are really creative. That is why a good firewall includes a yearly subscription service. The definitions are regularly updated to address current threats as the device monitors incoming traffic. In addition, it provides ways to block certain types of websites and spam. With a good device, you can block X-rated websites, sports or social media sites and much more. Depending on how

your network is configured, you can configure specific website blocking by a specific computer.

Access to pre-approved sites can be determined and set by management. Spam and other intrusions are blocked by the subscription service. Threats get updated in the firewall because of the subscription service. As new threats are created, those are included in the new updates. There is a cost for these updates. Usually this type of firewall is a minimum of $500-$800 or more with a renewal fee of $300-$500 depending on the size and type of your network.

If you are buying a new firewall, upgrading equipment or getting a new POS system, read carefully. When you see descriptions like "economy" or just the word "router," that should send up a red flag. A router is not a firewall. And anti-virus software is not a firewall. We are talking about two different things. You need both a hardware/software firewall and an anti-virus software program.

Anti-virus software is important. Yes, there are a number of vendors that offer "free" versions of their anti-virus software. If it is free, there is a reason. Free anti-virus is better than nothing, but you are running a business and processing lots of credit cards and you do have liability. Free anti-virus software usually has

limited functionality. If you want all the features, you most likely will have to pay for the more complete version.

When you purchase a good business-level anti-virus program, it should offer a control panel that usually runs on the server computer. This way, other users cannot alter or change the anti-virus settings. Virus definitions usually are configured to update every two to six hours. There are schedules that can be set as to when the computers are scanned, quick scans, deep scans and registry scans. There should be a display of the results of the scans, what is quarantined and alerts if something is not working correctly.

If you have an attachment with an email, make sure you know who the sender is before you click to open the program. Windows requires a mouse click to install programs. Know what you and your employees are doing when they get that email that warns of the lost UPS or FedEx shipment, or confirm you store credit card information. In almost all cases bad things will happen. The emails and alerts can be compelling and professionally presented. Be careful.

Not all anti-virus programs are equal. Some will slow down your computers and POS system.

Do not use the programs you see on a web browser that says "Free scan of your computer." Those will almost always find a virus (because they are written to display that info because sometimes it is not even doing a scan) and encourage you to buy the program after the scan. Many times, those programs are installing bad stuff on your computer. No anti-virus product is going to catch all viruses every time. Sometimes the bad guys get in your computer system.

If you are using Windows XP computers, it is time to replace them. As of April 8, 2014, Microsoft quit providing updates for the Windows XP operating system. A Windows XP computer, even if there is only one in your network, leaves the possibility of an open door to your computer network.

There are already numerous computer programs that will not run on Windows XP, because software companies no longer support that operating system. You want software programs that will run on Windows 7 or 8, 64 bit. That is now the standard when you buy a new computer. Windows does support a 32 bit compatibility mode, but that can be risky or may not always work.

The old Fram oil filter slogan "Pay me now or pay me later" is so true with computer security. The cost to fix the computer, possible lost data and down time can easily get into the hundreds and thousands of dollars. The cost of reinstalling the Windows operating system and other software programs can add up quick. Take action now and know you are protected. ■

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gung-ho when he came out of college, but he wanted to do things his way. He's since backed off and now runs an eBay business within the store. So, no, there are no firm plans. I wish I did.

Doug Greene
Manlius True Value | Manlius, N.Y.

SOUTH

Sales and customer counts so far in 2014?

Our situation is a little different. We're a home center; we look like a Lowe's from 10 to 15 years ago. Hardware is up for the year about 5 percent and lumber is down about 5 percent. Housing starts here have been strong, even way above the national average. Our growth in hardware I attribute to our diverse assortment. We carry a lot more than a traditional hardware store.

Best niche categories?

Outdoor power. We're one of the largest Stihl dealers in the area. We have 40 feet of Stihl and 30 feet of Husqvarna. We're fully stocked with power tool accessories and parts. Our green goods, such as plants, trees and