OUCH!

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Updating Your Software

GUEST EDITOR

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OVERVIEW

This month we will look at why updating your operating system, applications, and browser plug-ins is essential to maintaining your privacy and security. We will also provide tools and techniques to help you keep your software updated and secure. Vulnerabilities are bugs or weaknesses in your software that cyber attackers can exploit, and unfortunately, new vulnerabilities are being discovered constantly. Software vendors, such as Microsoft and Apple, issue updates (or patches) regularly to correct these vulnerabilities. As a result, updating your software is a key step to protecting yourself.

OPERATING SYSTEMS

Computers and mobile devices have operating systems, which is the software that allows you to interact with your system. Examples of operating systems for computers include Microsoft Windows and Mac OS X. Operating systems for mobile devices include Apple's iOS and Android OS. Microsoft Windows, long the favorite target for attackers, includes a utility for checking and updating your system automatically. Microsoft Update covers not only Windows but also many Microsoft applications you have installed, such as Office. Mac OS X has a similar auto-updating feature for OS X and Apple applications.

Keep in mind that even if you have auto-updating enabled, your computer must be able to download and install the updates, and some updates require rebooting your system before they take effect. For auto-updating to be most effective, we recommend you set your system to check for updates every day. Pick a time of day when your system will be powered on, awake, and connected to the Internet. When prompted, restart your computer without delay. You can also use the auto-updating tool in Windows and OS X to check for and install updates manually if you so choose.

iOS, for mobile devices like the iPhone and iPad, does not include an auto-updating tool. Users must check for and

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apply updates manually using iTunes. Android 2.x has an auto-updater that covers both the OS and installed apps. It requires your permission when they are ready to install.

SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS

Applications are additional programs you download and install on your computer or mobile device. The key to keeping your computer and mobile device apps updated and secure is to know which ones you have installed, whether or not they have a built-in auto-update utility, and if that utility is enabled. In addition, the more apps you have installed, the greater the risk you run of having a vulnerable system--a compelling reason to install only the apps that you need and use and to uninstall those unneeded and unused. Several of the most common applications, such as MS Office, Adobe Acrobat Reader, and Java, include an auto-updater, but most do not. When in doubt, check the software maker's website to determine what you need to do to keep an app updated.

We know and understand that keeping track of all your computer applications and their update status can be challenging. Good thing there are tools to help. One we recommend is Secunia's Personal Software Inspector (PSI). PSI scans your computer for known applications and attempts to determine which are out of date and provides links so you can update them. Unfortunately, there is no comparable tool for OS X we can recommend at this time.

Auto-updating is not built into iOS apps. It is up to the user to download app updates through iTunes manually. Android

Keeping your operating systems, applications and browser plugins up-to-date is one of the best ways to stay secure.

2.x has an auto-updater that covers both installed apps and the OS. It will require your permission when updates are ready to be installed.

BROWSER PLUG-INS

Finally, there are plug-ins (commonly called Add-ons). These are small software applications that enhance the functionality of your browser, such as Adobe Flash Player, Apple QuickTime, and Microsoft Silverlight. As plug-ins have proliferated, they have become a popular target for cyber attackers because they are difficult to keep updated.

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Again, the key to protecting yourself is to know which plug-ins you have installed and whether or not they are current. Most browsers give you the ability to see which plug-ins you have installed and their current version. Some popular plug-ins update themselves automatically.

It can be time-consuming to determine if your plug-ins are up to date. Qualys's Browser Check is a simple, easy-to-use, web-based tool that enables you to determine quickly which plug-ins you have installed, which are out-of-date, and how to update them. In addition, most common browsers contain a built-in tool for checking and updating plug-ins.

● Mozilla provides a web-based tool for Firefox that detects third-party plug-ins and provides links to updates. http://preview.tinyurl.com/ylhbg7v

● Chrome disables out-of-date plug-ins automatically. Clicking on "Update plug-in" takes you to that plug-in's website where you can download its latest version. http://preview.tinyurl.com/444vc59

● Safari has automatic updating for plug-ins (extensions), but by default it is not enabled. To activate it, open the Preferences window in Safari and select Extensions. Then select the Updates link at the bottom of the extensions list, and put a check in the Install Updates Automatically box. http://preview.tinyurl.com/3bou9z6

RESOURCES

Some of the links in this newsletter have been shortened for greater readability using the TinyURL service. To mitigate security issues, OUCH! uses TinyURL's preview feature, which shows you the ultimate destination of the link and asks your permission before proceeding to it.

Windows Updating: http://preview.tinyurl.com/26glz4q

OS X Updating: http://preview.tinyurl.com/4qmuqs

iOS Updating: http://preview.tinyurl.com/55freg

Android Updating: http://preview.tinyurl.com/3ycw2zr

Secunia's Personal Software Inspector (PSI):

http://preview.tinyurl.com/5wu6xo

Qualys's Browser Check:

http://preview.tinyurl.com/3m9gjr5

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