

The River Cities
DAILY TRIBUNE

‘Living In a Tech World’ Column

For Release 5.10.2009

Rick Melchior (techguy@vccdigital.com)

10 Ways to Muck-up Your Tech World: #6– Open all attachments and #7 – Click on every link

If you have been reading our column from the beginning you have already read the lecture on opening attachments to emails. But it is important enough to go over the basics again.

Here is the short list of extensions to never open: .EXE, .COM .VB .VBS .VBE .CMD .BAT .SCR .PIF .JAR .JS .JSE .LNK . These extensions identify executable files as opposed to data files. There are others. If you would like a more complete list and an explanation of what these files and other dangers you can find the original column and the supplemental information that I previously sent to clients at our website (<http://preview.tinyurl.com/d2tnq2>)

This brings us to the next recommendation for mucking-up your computer, **click on every link without a thought**. We have talked about the dangers of clicking on hyperlinks in e-mail messages and the same warning applies to Web pages. Malicious links can take you to Web sites that have embedded ActiveX controls or scripts that can perform all sorts of malicious activities, from wiping your hard disk to installing a backdoor program on your computer that a hacker can use to get in and take control of it. In some cases you click on what appears to be an interesting link on an innocuous website and suddenly your browser comes to life, opening windows, showing download symbols, just generally a lot more activity than you would expect from opening a web page. If this happens the best reaction is to manually turn off the computer. Not Shut Down but push and hold the power button. Then restart without a wireless or wired network connection. This may not prevent all the damage but it will mitigate it and allow you to cleanup the malicious files and get back to where you were. By the way, this is about the only time I recommend doing a ‘hot’ switch off, generally it is a very bad idea. Use the Shut Down method instead.

Clicking the wrong link can also take you to inappropriate Web sites that feature pornography, pirated music or software, or other content that can get you in trouble if you're using a computer on the job or even get you in trouble with the law. Don't give in to "click mania." More than 5 million U.S. consumers lost money to “phishing” attacks in the 12 months ended September 2008. The number of consumers affected was nearly 40% higher than the year prior. Links can be disguised in "phishing" messages or on Web sites to appear to take you to a different site from the ones they really point to. For example, the link might say www.safesite.com, but it actually takes

(More)

you to www.gotcha.com. The text you read is not necessarily the link information programmed into the web page. You can often find out the real URL by hovering over the link without clicking it. Just like file names, only the last two words in a link really matter. For instance, a link may be <http://somedword.bankofamerica.account.badguy.com>. The only part of that link that tells you who you are linking to is “badguy.com” all of the other words point to folders on the host computer. One last point, we are used to seeing .com, .org, .net, .gov which are the major generic codes but every country has their own domain name. For instance .ru is Russia, .uk is the United Kingdom so the country of registration is there to consider. Here is a source for all the top level domain names. (<http://preview.tinyurl.com/2otkd7>)

When you are exploring new websites, whether from a link on a known site or a recommendation from a friend, act as you would in any new neighborhood. Look around, consider what the site owner is trying most to do; inform you, entertain you or trick you. Never click on a link in a pop up screen. If a pop up intrigues you, note the product or website name, search for the URL and go there from a link on a credible search engine. It doesn't hurt to take a minute and read the content in the search engine. Sometime you will find warnings about a site or product. Remember, STOP! THINK! CLICK!

To ask a question or learn more about **VCC Digital's 'TECH GUY'** services which include a cost saving Personal Computer Consultant annual contract for individuals or business or computer repair go to <http://vccdigital.com> or email techguy@vccdigital.com