

Some downloads can be very costly!

By Bruce A. Love

This week we address three more questions from the business classes at our local high school:

1. What are the current rules/regulations on downloading free music from the Internet?

Understandably, there is still some confusion over the legal status of downloading free music from the Internet. After all, sites such as Kazaa.com (which provide the file-sharing services that make downloading music possible) proclaim that peer-to-peer (P2P) software has been ruled legal by U.S. courts. Technically speaking, this is true. It is also true that it is legal to own a gun in the U.S., but it is not legal to shoot somebody with it!

Last month, Federal agents seized computers and software as part of an investigation targeting criminal copyright abuses on networks used to illegally share music, movies, software and games. In the words of Attorney General John Ashcroft, "P2P does not stand for permission to pilfer." The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) used the occasion to announce that they were filing 744 new lawsuits against individuals they claimed illegally downloaded songs. Free music can be costly.

The bottom line is, while the mechanism to share files is legal, the act of downloading free copyrighted material is not. Copyright laws permit you to make a copy of your own purchased CD for your own personal use. You may not give a copy to another person.

2. What are the differences between computer viruses and worms?

Malicious software, or "malware," are programs that can do undesirable things to your computer. Many computer users mistakenly call all such maladies viruses, but there are some notable distinctions among them.

Viruses are programs that are designed to spread to applications on a single computer. They need a lot of help from careless humans to spread to other computers. They typically require other legitimate programs, such as Microsoft Word, in order to infect files and other applications.

Worms are tiny programs that exist independently, and propagate through computer networks, frequently using e-

mail address books. Creators of worms use a variety of techniques to trick computer users into opening them. Once this occurs, they multiply. Worms are often sent via email, Instant Message, or downloaded with other programs. Sometimes they arrive with files downloaded from P2P networks (are you sure you want to illegally download music?) Some worms rename themselves and hide your files so they are inaccessible; others overwrite the data, thus destroying files. Most ultimately consume memory and disk space, thereby incapacitating your computer, and costing you both time and money.

3. What do you recommend to use as anti-virus protection on home computers?

An estimated 63,000 computer viruses and other malware cause a lot of pain and anguish among computer users. With so many destructive menaces on the loose, operating a computer without protection is NOT an option!

There are several excellent products available to combat these viral demons. For years I had used either McAfee's Virus Scan or Norton Anti-virus. Both of these have received excellent reviews by most independent evaluators, and I found that each of these protected my computers very nicely. More recently, when my Norton license expired, I decided to try AVG by Grisoft (www.grisoft.com). I had heard several good reviews of the product, and the free price tag was appealing.

In my very unscientific comparison of these products, I found that I experienced more intrusions after switching to AVG. To be fair, these are probably attributed to several factors other than the new antiviral software. My new broadband connection, stronger strains of viruses, and exploited weaknesses of my operating system (XP Pro) are all likely contributing factors to the increased breaches in my network security. Still, I have decided to purchase a new copy of Symantec's Norton Anti-Virus 2004 (about \$40 - \$50). In addition to viruses, Norton also works on Trojan Horses, worms, and some spyware.

For more information about malware, including ways to remove it, read our "Trojan Warriors" article at loveconsulting.com/articles.htm.

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