Storm Season Is Just Around The Corner... Are You Protected?
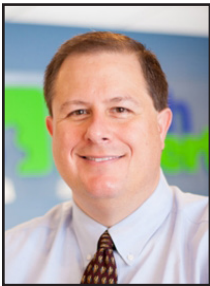
Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, southeast Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

We've just celebrated the first day of Spring, and before you know it, the weather will warm up and tulips will bloom.

Of course, we're also headed into Spring storm season.

If you haven't already, it is time to prepare for those pop-up storms that occur randomly at this time of year. These unexpected storms often result in everything from ice damage to lightning fires.

During this time of year the threat of fire, flood, severe storms, water damage from office sprinklers, and even theft is very real.

One of the most valuable assets for any company is its data. Hardware and software can easily be replaced, but a company's data cannot! As a reminder to all of our clients, here are some simple things you should do to make sure your company is ready for any natural disaster.

Back up your data remotely

Everyone knows that data should be backed up on a daily basis, but many people still use in-house tape drives that will get damaged in a natural disaster or fire, and can easily be stolen. We recommend backing up all

data to an off-site location, and we offer this as a service to our clients.

Use a quality surge protector with battery backup

A high quality surge protector combined with an uninterruptible power supply battery backup will go a long way in protecting sensitive electronic equipment from surges and other electronic irregularities that can destroy your computer's circuitry.

Make sure your servers are off the floor

If your office gets flooded, having your equipment off the floor will prevent it from being completely destroyed. Server racks can be purchased and installed very inexpensively.

Have a disaster recovery and business continuity plan

Every business should have some type of plan in place for continued operation after a disaster. Would people know where to go? Who to call? How to log in and access data remotely?

Hopefully you'll never need it, but having a simple plan will make you sleep a lot easier at night knowing you have a way to continue to operate when disaster strikes.

If you need help in any of these areas, give us a call! We can not only get you prepared, but also back up and running fast in the event of a disaster.

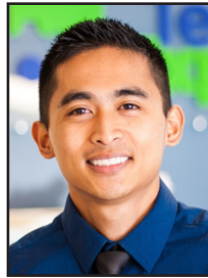Hardware and software can easily be replaced, but a company's data cannot!

Need help? Call the Tech Experts 24 hour computer emergency hotline at (734) 240-0200.

Don't Use Your Keyboard As A Dinner Plate And Three Other PC Best Practices To Live By

"Before you decide it's time to clean your computer, power it down and unplug it before doing so."

Michael Menor is Vice President of Support Services for Tech Experts.

Computers are complex devices that require special attention to keep in optimal shape. Unfortunately, some people don't pay enough attention to the current state of their computers.

Once you've cleaned your computer properly, though, it's important to make sure that it stays that way for as long as possible. Doing so can increase the longevity of your technology and prevent it from an untimely demise.

However, before you decide it's time to clean your computer, power it down and unplug it before doing so. It's better to be safe than sorry, especially with expensive hardware.

Don't eat, drink, or smoke at the computer

Remember all of those crumbs that fall out of your keyboard when you turn it upside down? All of those crumbs got there somehow and it's probably thanks to one habit that you might have: eating at your desk.

To minimize the amount of crumbs that fall onto your keyboard, it's best to just lock your PC and go eat somewhere else, like the kitchen, dining room, or break room. Furthermore, smoking in the same room as your computer can gunk up your fans and other components with ash, tar, and other nasty substances that are found in cigarettes.

In general, it can be good to separate yourself from your computer while you eat. If you're doing it at work, it separates the work environment from you momentarily, which can be helpful for maintaining your sanity.

Clean your PC regularly

Giving your PC a thorough cleaning is only the first step toward ensuring that your computer remains in optimal shape. In order to keep it that way, you need to set up regular upkeep cleaning sessions where you clean out the keyboard, the monitor, and the main body of your PC.

Doing so can considerably prolong its lifespan and it makes it more appealing to look at when you have to sit in front of it for hours on end.

We think it's safe to say that you should clean your PC at least twice a year, maybe more if your lifestyle calls for it.

Give it room to breathe

In order to keep your PC functioning at optimal efficiency, you need to give it the space it requires to run without overheating. In other words, you should keep it in an open location, where all of the fans are capable of keeping air circulation flowing.

This prevents overheating and can improve overall functionality of the device. Furthermore, you should keep your PC tower off of carpet if possible, to help with keeping the heat low.

Constantly clear dust collection

Desktop PCs and workstations tend to be a bit on the large side and therefore, don't move around as much as laptops or other smaller devices do. This leads to computers collecting dust in the fans, vents, and just about anywhere else.

It's important that you keep your PC dust-free whenever possible; otherwise, it could run into operational issues due to overheating, keyboard stickiness, and so on.

In fact, dust can even cause PC components to seize up and stop working.

The best way you can keep your computer dust-free is to keep a can of compressed (or "canned") air right on your desk. This way, you'll have a neat tool for cleaning your PC available at your disposal. Please be sure that you don't spray liquids at your computer, ever. If you have to use a liquid cleaner, use water, and use a damp cloth rather than a spray bottle to directly apply the liquid, but never use water on an internal computer component.

Bots! What Are They And How Do They Affect Me?

Bruce Stykemain is a Network Engineer with Tech Experts.

First of all, what in the world is a "bot?" Most people have at least heard of them before, but may not know what exactly they are. A bot is a program designed to operate on its own and carry out whatever function it was intended to. Basically, a robot doing what it's told.

They can run offline, online, or even as a combination, running offline and collecting information then sending it via email over the Internet.

An example of a bot is a web crawler. When you type in a search into Google, it uses crawlers to search the millions of sites and content for keywords you enter, then reports back. Web crawlers can also be used for data mining.

So how do these affect you? People employ the use of both good bots and bad bots. Most that you encounter are good ones, such as the search engine crawlers, but others can collect your private information.

Good bots or data miners are helpful, making your life easier or personalizing your ad experiences.

They can track statistics for marketing, like what types of things you shop for or what videos you watch on YouTube. In turn, they use this data to put those personalized ads on your screen. Sure, they might be annoying, but their intention is good.

Another example of a good bot could be when you post something on your Facebook account. A bot goes out to the site you're sharing from and grabs whatever information it is programmed to take, then that information is posted on your page. Although it might seem simple, it's a time-consuming task to complete manually, which the bot takes care of for you.

Then we have the bad side of bots. As easy it is to program a bot or data miner to collect innocent information, it is just as easy for a malicious person to program a bot to gather information they should not have, like banking information.

They can be programmed to go to hundreds (if not thousands) of sites, servers, or computers where highly sensitive data is stored. They take the information and send it back to their creator.

A recent example of malicious bot would be from the Ashley Madison hack. What they did was create bots that acted as profiles to attract others and steal information from them. Of course there are a myriad of other bad bots out there.

So how do you handle bots? Typically, you would handle them just as you would other malicious content through anti-virus and strong firewalls – along with using your judgment and staying away from suspicious sites, emails, and chat messages.

Data-mining can be blocked, but contact your trusted tech support provider before downloading or installing any programs or browser extensions.

As always, if you have any questions or if you're interested in finding out how to better block bots, feel free to give us a call at 734-457-5000, or email us at support@mytechexperts.com.

> *"Most that you encounter are good ones, such as the search engine crawlers, but others can collect your private information."*

Ransomware Now Targeting Mac Computers

While ransomware has been around for some time, it has never appeared to pose a threat to Apple's Mac computers. That recently changed with the first attack of its kind last month. Ransomware is a malicious software that, once downloaded, essentially locks important files on a computer and then prompts users to pay a fee to have those files unlocked. There have undoubtedly been attempts to target Mac users in this way in the past, but this incident involving KeRanger software transmitted through the peer-to-peer file sharing network BitTorrent was the first successful one.

The attack affected approximately 6500 Mac users who downloaded the malicious KeRanger software. In the scheme of things, that number is quite low. The incident, however, proves that Mac users aren't immune to this type of threat. As John Bambeneck of Fidelis Cybersecurity notes, "It's a small number but these things always start small and ramp up huge. There's a lot of Mac users out there and a lot of money to be made." In this case, Palo Alto Networks detected the ransomware quickly, which is why Apple was able to neutralize the problem.

In the future, however, ransomware attacks on Macs may become more subtle. Apple reports that it has increased its security measures and revoked the digital certificate that was responsible for launching the KeRanger software.

Should Your Business Get A Backup Internet Connection?

With most business operations tied to the Internet, it is important to consider a backup plan in the event that your Internet connection goes down.

A host of things can cause issues with Internet service from natural disasters to provider caused issues, and unfortunately, those are beyond your control.

Choosing whether or not your business should have a backup Internet connection, however, is within your power.

You should first identify how much your business depends on the Internet for its operations when making this decision. In other words, could your business operate, if the Internet was to go down for a few hours without suffering a significant monetary loss? What about for a few days?

Chances are that your business would at least operate at a disadvantage without another way to access the Internet. If that is not the case, deliberating about backup connections may not be your best use of time.

For the rest of the business world, however, the real question lies in what kind of backup Internet connection you should seek.

Most experts will agree that it is wise to have your backup connection one notch lower than your primary one.

For instance, if your primary Internet connection is fiber, your secondary connection could be a T1 line. If your primary is a T1 line, try DSL or cable for your secondary.

That way, you're not making a huge downward leap such as from fiber to dial-up, and your employees wouldn't be at too much of a disadvantage.

This approach also takes into account your business' budget. Your secondary connection will be a little less expensive than your primary while still being somewhat close in capability.

You'll also need to make sure that your firewall has the capability to support more than one Internet connection. Most of the firewalls we recommend to clients include this as an option; however, the consumer grade routers sold at big box stores rarely offer this as an option.

Another important feature is to make sure your firewall can automatically detect outages, and switch Internet connections to keep you up and running without manually having to switch connections.

Google Maps "Guesses" Your Destination, Getting Smarter

In further proof of how the digital age has transformed daily life, you no longer have to make tough decisions about where to go when you access Google Maps from an Android device.

Google Maps now has a new feature that predicts where you would like to go and weighs all the pros and cons for you between potential destinations – even if you weren't actively debating your options.

Let's say you usually go to a favorite coffeehouse at about the same time every Saturday. Google Maps can now alert you if the

traffic to your normal destination is exceptionally bad and can automatically provide you with less stressful alternatives based on your past behavior. You don't even have to enter a destination – it all happens just by opening Google Maps.

The mapping app will also alert you to gas prices in the area, your estimated time of arrival to each option, and tell you the quickest way to get to your preferred choice. You can even add shortcuts, that Google Maps may have overlooked, for future use.

While this all sounds futuristic, it

has the potential to be a huge time saver. Any time that you're not quite sure of where you're going, you can get the lowdown on the trip to your potential destinations without having to actually go there.

You can access this new feature on Android devices on the sidebar of Google Maps. Choose the option to Start Driving, and the application will quickly help you decide, if you really want to try the newest restaurant on the other side of town or stick closer to home with a tried-and-true location and have time to spare for an after-dinner coffee or cocktail.

Create new service requests, check ticket status, and review invoices in our client portal: *http://www.TechSupportRequest.com*