

# to making easier

**Richard Greenane**, Technical Director of IT consultancy SupportsIT, has spent the last six years dedicated to providing proactive IT support exclusively to the SME business sector and outlines how designers can best manage their computer systems.

**W**hile I will always advocate the use of an IT professional to deal with all of your IT issues, it is sometimes necessary to take responsibility for your own IT infrastructure. Over the last ten years of dealing with small business users, I have found that there are only a small number of rules (or tasks) that, if employed, will prevent the vast majority of IT problems occurring. The rules below can be applied to either Microsoft or Apple based systems users.

## **RULE 1** **Be careful opening ALL attachments delivered through email:**

This regularly catches out clients of mine. If you receive an email with an attachment you must be careful to investigate it before you open the attachment. The most common of today's viruses are transmitted through email. These viruses look through the address books of their infected hosts, select a random subject heading and send as many infected emails as possible to those addresses. Microsoft does not send emails to its users with files for updates attached. Do not be fooled by this so only update your system from the Microsoft website.

## **RULE 2** **Update your virus software regularly:**

You must have virus software. If you don't then you should purchase it. It will save you time and money in the long run. The software that we use the most frequently is Norton Antivirus. We have found this software to be perfect for both home and corporate users although the corporate edition is best for a larger number of computers. Once you have antivirus software installed you must update it on a regular basis. Virus writers are prolific and new viruses appear all of the time. Antivirus software works because it can recognise the specific virus and can remove it. Without regular updates to your virus software, it is basically useless. Most virus software allows you to set updates to occur automatically. This is more useful if you have a broadband connection which is "always on". Mac users do not have to worry too much about spyware and viruses at present. This is mainly because the focus of spyware writers has so far been on Windows and NOT because Mac OSX is that much more secure.

## **RULE 3** **Update your operating system:**

Keeping your operating system updated and in good shape is important. Hackers find new exploits in operating systems all of the time most of the time their findings are reported to operating system makers who release a patch to fix it. These patches must be downloaded by you to update your system, the best place being <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com/>

**RULE 4** **Remove programs that you do not use:** Most of us use 'install and try out' programs all of the time. We download from the web, install from friends and from CDs on magazines. This has the effect that we have lots of installed software on our machines that we never use. Regular removal of unwanted programs will improve your system performance and save disk space.

On new MS Windows and Apple computers, there is an awful lot of software that we never use, pre-installed on the machine. This is commonly termed 'bloat ware' and is notorious for slowing a machine down, therefore, after purchasing a new machine, it is advisable to go through it and remove all of the software that is not needed.

**RULE 5** **Stop spam:** Spam (unsolicited email) is a common problem for a lot of users. Spam comes from people and companies who are advertising their products and services.

Many products exist to block unwanted email; however there are a number of things that you can do to stop people getting hold of your email address. Pick an uncommon email address as some email lists simply guess a name. Get a bogus address from hotmail and use this address whenever you are asked to register with a website that you are unsure of. Use spam blocking software to protect you fully.

**RULE 6** **Save files in standard places such as "My Documents":** If you save all of your documents in the same place then you will know how to find them again. Doing this also allows you to move your files easily.

**RULE 7** **Make your passwords longer:** A long password makes it many times more difficult to crack. The longer the password the more difficult it is. Choose a small sentence as a password, change some of the letters to numbers and replace some of the spaces with punctuation characters.

**RULE 8** **Use software to delete spy ware and don't install it again:** Spybot Search and Destroy can be downloaded to remove all spyware and adware from your machine: [www.safer-networking.org/index.php?page=download](http://www.safer-networking.org/index.php?page=download) Spyware is a type of software that monitors which sites you are browsing on the internet and sends this information to a central store, which is then used for marketing purposes.

**RULE 9** **Save your files often and make backups:** Lost files are a common problem. Most people blame the computer, however if you save your files often then there is usually no data lost if the computer crashes. Hard disks crash very rarely but making regular backups of data that you can't afford to lose is important.

**RULE 10** **Shutdown Gracefully:** All recent operating systems provide a way of shutting down your computer. When shutting down gracefully the computer will save any changed settings, reset anything that needs resetting and sometimes repair broken programs. Turning off power to your system while it is still running can be a disaster.

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