

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Scambuster

By Douglas E. Welch

As with life in general, high-tech life is fraught with scams and scammers. These people are always on the prowl for people they can confuse and con. Along with all your other responsibilities as a high-tech worker, you should be aware of these scams and do everything you can to protect your clients. It can take only an unwary moment or a bit of confusion to allow their computer to be compromised in ways large and small. You owe it to yourself and your clients to help educate them long before they have to face the consequences of a scam.

Get the Word Out

Your first line of defense against scams and scammers is education. Even with the best antivirus and anti-spyware software installed, it is often the users themselves who open the door to a scam. Whenever a new scam appears, or an older one starts making the rounds again, I e-mail my clients. I also include a notice in my monthly newsletter. I instruct my clients to call, e-mail or instant message me if they ever have a doubt about a particular e-mail or software update. I cannot count the number of times I have prevented users from handing out their private information or risking possible destruction of their data using this rule alone.

This education process should be a constant part of your relationship with your clients. Whenever I visit someone, or talk on the phone, I remind them about their antivirus upgrades, free software to check for spyware, and any new exploits that might have shown up. There are always new hoaxes being developed, and old hoaxes being slightly modified in hopes of going unrecognized by a new group of users. You can never let down your guard.

Part of the education process is giving your clients places to perform their own scam research. I have a variety of Web sites that I use to confirm the veracity of a particular scam. My first step is to take a significant sentence from any suspect e-mail and use it as a search term in Google. Often this will turn up a variety of information regarding the e-mail. In most cases, this quickly shows it as a known hoax or scam.

There are also Web sites dedicated to the tracking and

debunking of Internet hoaxes and scams. I often turn to Vmyths.com (<http://vmyths.com>) if Google doesn't turn up anything significant to my search. You can easily search Vmyth's database of known hoaxes and variants, and the site also produces regular e-mail newsletters to help keep you and your clients informed.

Self-Preservation

Sure, I could gain hours of work by focusing on cleanup of damage instead of prevention, but cleanup work generates ill will with your clients, and can eventually chase them away from using computers entirely. While the user is not upset with you or your work, the self-recriminations over being taken in by a scam can color her relationship with you.

Since you are the person clients deal with face to face, you can sometimes, unfairly, bear the brunt of their anger and frustration. Constantly having to clean up a client's computer will eventually sour your relationship, regardless of how the user was infected or scammed. I would much rather spend my time teaching clients how to get the most out of their computer. It is much more rewarding for both of us.

It is an act of self-preservation to do everything you can to protect your clients. Recommend and install antivirus software. Be on the watch for hoax e-mail and spyware that can compromise the security of a client's computer. Above all else, educate and communicate whenever possible. This will ensure that your time, and your client's time, is as productive as possible. This productivity will result in a longer, more lucrative, relationship with your clients.

Developing a relationship with your clients can be a major factor in building your high-tech career, and protecting them from scams is an important way to build a bond. It doesn't take a large amount of time or energy to pass along scam information or assist your clients in protecting themselves, but it can yield large rewards for both. Don't let your high-tech career founder on the scams of others. □

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