

courtesy of Sandy Ross (.ca) ❖ wordsmith@SandyRoss.ca ❖ 519-472-5322
Well-crafted copy to help you “get the word out and get your Word's Worth!”

We thank [John Greenshields](#), a director with B&G Security, Inc., for writing this article – reprinted here with his permission, and not to be considered the copyright of Sandy Ross.

It's 9:00 am Monday – do you know where your hard drive's been?

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Computer security for a home business may seem a non-issue. We send a few e-mails, surf, research products and prospects. What's the worry? In an ideal world: not much. But let's look at the home computer (PC) used for business.

If others share the living space – say, teenagers – who knows what your machine's “been rigged with”. As with the teen, where it's been on a Saturday night may surprise you. It's fine to appreciate their savvy, but also appreciate that they can get your PC into trouble as fast as they pulled it from the spiral you put it in. You'll be frustrated and without a working computer. So know where your PC has been, is going, and what others – even house guests – are doing with it.

Keep it in a visible area. Visit the browser's history tab, delete cookies and temporary internet files, and check for what other folks may have installed (under programs, or as desktop icons, or any new folders in Windows Explorer).

Remember the cool discs and accessories that came with the PC? Store them securely, especially any that install working programs. If – or more like, when – your PC has a meltdown, it's vital for the trusted tech rescue worker to access these. Downloaded replacements may not be the right version, or be damaged in transit on the net. And the cords in the back – they go where, again? Colour coding and sticky notes help. (You're on your own not to bang your head under the desk.)

Internet access. Leaving your e-mail address on various sites, even your own, will result in its placement on marketing and scam lists. If you surf the net, you'll receive unsolicited e-mails. At least minimize the trail with a business address like “info@mybiz.com”. Reply from your personal box to e-mails you want. Many viruses exploit flaws in your browser, so upgrade it regularly with the manufacturer's source files. Recovery costs for a hard drive wrecked by a virus can be as much as what you paid when you bought it. And keep firewall and virus scanning definitions up-to-date (on laptops, too).

Use disc defragmenter and scandisk programs regularly, so your hard drive's clean and organized. If you don't ‘defrag’, it's like keeping one client's paper files strung out through 15 active file folders. When you need the file, you have to open all 15 and put them back when you're done. Defrag speeds up the PC, too. Scandisk checks hard drives for errors, fixes them, and gives a warning heads-up to replace the hard drive before it dies (taking all your critical data with it).

Back it up a sec. If you can't recall when the hard drive was last backed up, do it. If you're worried it'll be 352 floppies (the actual count on my old PC), buy a zip drive (just two discs) or a thumb drive (easiest, portable).

When you upgrade to a new PC, keep the old one for backup, general family use, or as a boat anchor. One advantage to having two is that one goes on the net, and the other doesn't. Even in the latter case, keep firewall and virus scanners up-to-date. If you use a wireless router to network your computers, use the encryption settings to prevent unauthorized access to your hard drives and internet.

Know how your machine ‘handles’. A slight change in how it operates is often the first clue to a problem. Like some teenagers, your computer has behavior patterns – but unlike these youth, the PC can't tell you it's sick and needs a day off until it's too late. So, in the event of a major glitch, take the original discs, the PC, and back-up files to a reputable dealer/repair shop that will listen to you, diagnose the problem, and hand it back in better condition than they found it. (Now, any idea who can do that with our teens?) ❖

B & G Security, Inc. is a [private investigations and security](#) firm in London, Ontario with some interest in matters pertaining to computer security, and whose consultants can be reached at 519-457-9996.