



Online Success Newsletter Interview with Michael Van Art from The Computer Guy!

Q – OSN

A – Michael

Q-1: Let's start with some troubleshooting questions. What's hot right now with virus protection software? Is there some easy to use (or free) virus protection software out there that you'd recommend?

A: The antivirus software I am using these days is a new one from Microsoft called "Microsoft Security Essentials" and besides being a good and competent program, it's free. It combines antivirus and antispyware in one application. Other antivirus programs I like and have used (all freeware) are AVG and Avast! There are two commercial software programs that get a lot of attention, Norton and Kaspersky Anti-Virus.

I haven't purchased commercial antivirus software in many years. I haven't had a virus in that time either...

Q-2: Do you think Mac users need to have virus protection? If so, do you have any recommendations?

A: Yes, but I am not familiar with all the programs available for a Mac other than Norton so that is the only one I can recommend.

Q-3: Spyware is another scary thing that a lot of people don't really understand. It seems like as we get more comfortable on the web we're giving away more information about ourselves and credit numbers faster than ever before. What can we do to protect ourselves?

A: You're right, spyware is scary. Do I worry about it? No, because I have a hardware firewall, five different antispyware/malware programs that I run weekly. As for giving my credit card information out I do, but only to sites I know are secure. You can tell if the site is secure by the web site name, it will change from

<http://whateversite.com> to <https://whateversite.com>. Note the 's' after the http. Finally, use your common sense, do you really want to order something from a site called www.givemeyourcreditcarddummy.com ? If you're unsure of a site, 'Google' it and see what others say about it. Finally, you can always go to a site like www.scambusters.org to get more information about a site or a questionable download or program.

Q-4: Is there a way to tell if you have spyware or a virus on your system?

A: The first sign is when your computer **s-l-o-w-s d-o-w-n** to a crawl. If it takes more than 3 or 4 minutes to start up you've got a problem. Another sign is to have it crash or freeze regularly.

Q-5: Do you recommend leaving your computer on all the time or turning it off every night? Does it matter?

A: With the exception of my laptop, my other computers are always on. The only thing I turn off is the monitor.

Q-6: I know one of the worst problems for computers is having your hard drive crash and losing everything. What kinds of factors lead to hard drive crashes? Are there any warning signs to watch out for?

A: Stuff happens. Hard drives crash and die as a direct result of being used. I act on the assumption, proven true too many times, that my hard drive will die in about 5 minutes from now. In fact, my main system went 'south' a month ago. If I hadn't been backing up every week I would have been up that legendary creek. As it was I lost a week's worth of work. So I have learned the mantra "I will back up, I will back up, I will back up". Businesses and anyone whose work or life will be harmed by missing data should back their systems up daily.

What can you look for as a sign of a failing drive? Sometimes you'll get no indication at all, you'll turn the power on and nothing happens. If you're lucky you'll hear a clicking sound coming from the box. Or, it'll crash randomly when you know your antivirus and antispyware programs are up-to-date.

Q-7: What kind of backup systems do you recommend? What is essential?

A: There are a lot of good backup programs out there but the one I rely on is built into Windows 7. Yes, they finally got it right. Most backup programs allow you a free trial before buying so you can determine if it works for you. Some will make an image of your whole drive, some you can tell it to just back up your data and email. Some are easy to use; some are like a Chinese jigsaw puzzle. The only freeware program I have used is Karen's Replicator, it is easy to use but not full featured.

Any backup system must contain an external drive or a computer that is expressly for maintaining backups, such as a NAS (Network Attached Storage). There's no point in backing up to the same drive your programs and data are on. Fortunately you can get a good external drive with lots of room for under \$100. Some even come with a built-in backup program. If you have a business a NAS is a must.

Q-8: What about upgrading? How can we know when it's time to upgrade our system or buy a new computer?

A: I upgrade because I want to save money and have a faster system. If a part is still good, say a hard drive or a DVD drive, etc. why buy a new one? And why do I need another case? The one I have works fine. Those are my reasons for upgrading that and I just plain like building computers. The other reason for upgrading is to get a speed or capacity upgrade, i.e. adding memory or a faster hard drive. These are easy and relatively quick upgrades that anyone can do and are affordable, generally giving the best bang for the buck. As for how you will know if you need an upgrade or a new system it is pretty simple, if you can't do what you want to do with your computer or it takes too long to do something then it is time to upgrade. For example, if your job requires you to edit videos and it takes three hours to render a five minute video it's way past time to upgrade.

Q-9: Speaking of upgrading, what are the main differences you are seeing between Windows 7 and Windows XP?

A: XP crashes more and is less secure than Windows 7. Visually, Windows 7 is prettier and has far more features that are useful (backup, snip tool) than XP. To top it off, support for XP is soon over, no more updates or patches to retail customers. It's true you need a faster computer to run Windows 7 than you do with XP, but, any computer that is five years old or newer will most likely run Windows 7 either as they are or by adding more memory. Windows 7 requires 1GB of ram and a 1Ghz processor as a minimum. (I have run it on a 700MHz cpu with 512MB of ram but that's just because I'm a geek and wanted to see if it would run, it does,

slowly.) My recommendation is you need at least a 1.2GHz cpu and 2GB of ram. Naturally, the faster the cpu, motherboard and ram (up to 3GB for the 32 bit version of Win 7) the happier the user will be.

Q-10: Since it seems that Windows 7 is moderately stable, do you see a lot of consumers moving to it?

A: Windows 7 has been stable since early beta. No 'moderately' about it. I know, I started using it a year before it was released to the public. Never has Microsoft had such a stable system from day 1. About 35% of my clients have moved to Win 7 in the first 4 months and I believe everyone would be happier using it providing it is within their personal budgets.

Q-11: Does Windows 7 have any easy ways to back up important documents like photos or music? I know that can be some of the most precious commodities on people's computers.

A: Absolutely, see answer 7.

Q-12: Do you have any other free software recommendations that are "must haves?" for PC users?

A: Yes, the ones I use are:

- MS Security Essentials
- Glary Utilities
- Spybot Search & Destroy
- Adaware
- Advanced System Care
- Revo Uninstaller
- Smart Defrag and last, but not least,
- CCleaner

These go on every machine I build and you can find them by 'Googling' their names with download after it..

Q-13: Can you explain some of the differences between notebooks and netbooks?

A: The obvious differences are size and price. Both are smaller. Notebooks have been faster, notice I said "have been". Now you can get an 11.6" netbook with 3 or 4GB of memory, dual core cpu speed and a large hard drive for under \$700 that runs Win 7 Pro. I have installed Win 7 Ultimate on a \$350 netbook with 2GB of ram very successfully. In fact, I took one to Europe in 2008 right after they came out and I loved it with one exception, the keyboard was too small. That's no longer an issue.

Q-14: What are some of the pros and cons of using netbooks?

A: The Pro is they're small and light, less than 3 pounds. You can take them anywhere. They have cameras, 3 USB ports, card readers, modem, Ethernet and wireless. The con for a netbook costing under \$400 is processor speed, amount of memory and no optical drive. Most are configured with a 1.2 or 1.3 GHz cpu, 1GB of ram and Windows XP or Win 7 starter. If you buy a netbook, double up on the memory and you'll be good to go.

Q-15: Do you think the popularity of netbook sales will continue, or is it more of a passing trend?

A: No trend, they're here for the long term. Price is too good, form factor too convenient and they're cute.

Q-16: What is in store for laptops in the future? It seems like the cell phone has in some ways replaced the need for a laptop, but the tiny screen size is a big deterrent. What's next?

A: They'll continue to get lighter, faster and cheaper. A cell phone, in my opinion, will never replace my laptop for the exact reason you have pointed out, their screens are too small as are their keyboards.

The next big hype is a tablet pc that people will like to use. Expect Apple, and a few others, to come out with a tablet pc this year. If it follows form Apple's tablet pc will be beautiful and cost an arm and a leg. Tablet pc's have never gained traction in over 5 years they've been around. It'll be interesting to see what the new generation of tablet pc's bring, other than a big price. Are we ready to spend a lot more for something that has a 'cool' factor? Not me.

Q-17: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

A: Computers are an integral part of our lives and I believe this will never end.

I don't think bigger and faster is as important as it once was. Most of us do not need a super-fast computer. We use email, a word processing program, a web browser and a chat program, that's it. For those applications a 1 - 2 GHz CPU, single or dual core, with 2GB of ram memory is more than enough using XP or Win 7. Would the average user benefit from a triple or quad core CPU? Nope. Besides, the vast majority of programs written cannot take advantage of these extra cores and until they do they're not important. What people should be focusing on is backing up their systems and running regularly scheduled maintenance programs rather than triple or quad core systems with 8Gb of ram.

Q-18: I'd like to end our discussion with an important topic for anyone who uses the Internet: net neutrality. Could you talk a little about net neutrality and what it means?

A: This may sound strange but it is not a story or something I follow or even think about. Having said that I want the internet to remain as it is today, free and open.

Q-19: Do you see any impact coming from net neutrality in the short term?

A: No.

End of Interview

To learn more about Michael Van Art from The Computer Guy and Serena Carcasole From VBS On Demand visit their websites at:

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