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ReadyNetGo News

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<http://www.readynetgo.net>

TIP OF THE MONTH

If you download freeware or shareware from the internet:

1. Be particular about where you download new programs. Some sites check and review the software before it is listed. Be wary of incomplete websites.
2. If you're on a network, check with your system administrator before downloading. Some programs are known to conflict with operating systems and other essential programs.
3. Read reviews from both professionals and personal users before downloading. Pay attention to reviews listing specs that most closely resembles your own PC.
4. Read the software agreement thoroughly and navigate around the website. Does the company offer a phone number to call for tech support? How long has the product been offered? Is there an online help system with manuals or FAQ's?
5. If, after downloading, you run into problems, uninstall the program. Good programs will include an uninstall feature within the software. If the software doesn't have an internal uninstall feature, use the Add/Remove programs feature in Window's Control Panel.

You Get What You Pay For

If the word **FREE** puts a twinkle in your eye, you're not alone. Most people are enticed by this simple word, but when it comes to computers, free isn't always a good deal. Many free programs are wrought with bugs, can compromise your system's resources and worse, some can even put detection software on your computer without your knowledge.

Gator is one of the worst offenders of a free program that is supposed to make your life easier but can actually do more harm than good. Gator.com offers a service for storing common usernames and passwords for frequently visited websites. If you do a lot of online shopping or have many online accounts, it can get cumbersome to remember and manually type in all of this information each time you visit.

Gator solves this by putting a cookie on your computer so that when you visit a website, the software recognizes it and will fill in the appropriate username, password, and any other piece of information you've listed. Unfortunately, if you download the software, Gator will target specific advertising to you based on your online surfing habits and where you live. In addition, if you visit a website that has a Gator pop up window, you may unwittingly download their software thinking it is important to view the current website. Unless you read the fine print, you'll never know that gator.com is tracking your online activity and reporting information about your computer. In a nutshell, if you're concerned about online privacy, avoid gator.com.

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

1. www.pahighways.com/exits - Before leaving on a trip track mileages, rest areas, gas stations etc.
2. www.pta.org - It's that time of year again! Check out this site for info on the Parent/Teacher Association.
3. www.gameskidsplay.net - Re-live old memories with this handy link for rhymes and directions for kid's games.
4. www.brainevent.com - cool site for kids and teenagers - current affairs, poems, pop culture, lots more.

Internet Searching To find past newsletter issues, go to: www.readynetgo.net/newsletter/

A similar situation has occurred with **Kazaa**, which offers peer-to-peer file sharing software (useful for downloading MP3s, MPEGs and other audio/video files). Users who download the software are able to access files on other people's computers and vice versa. With Kazaa's software, however, all of your files are capable of being downloaded, not just the files you specify. For this reason, it is extremely important to read the Terms of Service and any privacy documents that companies offer before downloading and using certain types of software.

Other free services, such as email accounts, can leave you screaming from all the spam you end up getting. Two accounts that have a long standing history of spam attractors are Hotmail (Microsoft's free email service) and Juno. Hotmail is notorious for pornography and product solicitations while Juno has ventured into postal mail solicitations as well as through email.

While free email accounts are valuable to use for online inquiries, purchases, and mailing lists, you might want to consider getting a regular email account for personal correspondences (many email accounts are reasonably priced – check around or give us a call for suggestions). If you do sign up with a free account, make sure your username is somewhat cryptic; a username like "michael" is much easier for spammers to target than "michael25".

Beware of FREE services that seem too good to be true

Remember the saying, "there's no such thing as a free lunch"? In the world of computers, this rings true time and time again. Every once in awhile though, a company keeps true to their promise and actually provides a valuable service or product for free. Most of the time, however, these companies will offer a free or reduced price product to individuals because their primary customers are corporations. Computer Associates is an example of a company that used to offer a free version of their anti-virus software to individuals because their main clientele was businesses. The company has recently changed this practice and now offers a 30 day trial after which home users must purchase the software.

So keep in mind that if a product or service is free, there is or probably will be a catch. Either companies will eventually start charging for their free products (like Computer Associates or many e-card websites where you are now charged for sending a card via email) or your personal information will be sold or traded to other companies.

Microsoft's Passport service is another example of a product that is free now but in all likelihood will be a pay-for-use service in the future. The information that Microsoft will store (such as usernames, passwords, credit card information etc. for use with online transactions) is just too valuable. So if you're interested in a free product or service, try it out and see if it works for you. Many utilities and services are valuable and will greatly improve your efficiency. Just monitor your email or the company's website for updates to their policies. [Company's have the right to change their policies at any time so check back often.]

Remember ...

- Don't open email attachments that you aren't expecting.
- Update your anti-virus software files.
- **BACKUP YOUR COMPUTER REGULARLY!**