Does your computer system leak information?

If you are using your computer for any communications, chances are great that your computer leaks information. The good news is that there are a number of tools and tests you can use to see if information is leaking and to correct any problems this leaking creates for you and your clients.

The cause of this information leak is that, in the normal course of communication and data exchange, data are deposited on your computer that makes communication easier. It also allows marketers to trace your path through various sites on the Internet. There are ethical and strategic reasons to keep this tracking at bay so the management of the data that marketers deposit on your computer becomes a priority.

There are at least four concerns that you can probe and fix with tools that are easily available. They are conveniently available by hypertext links from one Internet uniform resource locator (URL) http://www.comusolv.com/Security/tests.htm--and are all available free of charge. The four concerns are the leaking firewall, the invasion of your system by "spyware," the ease of system compromise by errors and other security holes, and your own knowledge of your Internet protocol address.

Firewall Leaks

Firewalls are software tools that safeguard your computer from invasion. If you have an Internet connection that is permanent-through a cable or a DSL (dedicated subscriber line), you are subjected to an average of between twenty and fifty attempts to invade your computer daily. The bulk of these invasion attempts come from outside the USA. It is in your interest to have an effective firewall in place to keep your computing reasonably safe. That is important whether or not you have a continuous Internet connection.

The test you can run--available through the hypertext link from the Comusolv.com website--is Gibson Research Corporation's "Leak Test."

Download the software, install it and discover how leaky your system is. Depending on the security of your firewall, you may feel a bit better after the process--at least, on the day of the test.

Spyware

Spyware is computer code that helps other computers track where you have been on the Internet. This raises ethical concerns for lawyers about the maintenance of confidentiality of information on computer hard disks. A German company has created tool called "Ad-Aware," available through a hypertext link from the Compusolv.com website, that scans your computer for known spyware and lets you get rid of it. It is prudent to do this scan regularly. A good time to do it is when you are running virus signature updates for your antivirus software (because you are thinking about the problem).

General Security Scan

One of the most humbling experiences you will ever have is to see how easy it is for a computer-with no human intervention-to hack into your computer system in seconds and provide you with a comprehensive list of what you did not think about when you put your system online. The program is called "Shields UP!" and it scans for holes, errors, and security risks. Then, the program will tell you what to do to solve the problem. This is a scan from the Gibson Research website-you do not download or install any software. Again, this service is available through a hypertext link from the Comusolv.com website.

Your Internet Protocol Address

Most users who have a permanent Internet connection do not know what their Internet protocol address is. Hackers will find it because it is fixed. If you have one of these connections, your knowledge of your Internet protocol address allows you to take steps to safeguard your computer and the data on it. Gibson Research's "IP Agent" tells you what that protocol address is and you can download the software telling you your protocol address by using a hypertext link from the Comusolv.com website. If you use a dial-up connection for your online communication, you do not have a permanent Internet protocol address. As a practical

matter, when you use a dial-up connection you get a temporary protocol address every time you go online. Without a permanent connection, you will not have this threat of the invasion of a fixed target.