New Year's Security Resolutions, Updates, and Evolutions

Some things stay the same. Some change, mostly variations on an old theme. And some just show up out of nowhere. This year's security issues are mostly like last year's, but as I still get calls saying "I called that number" or "I clicked that email". Here's what to prepare for and expect to happen in 2024.

Resolutions

- Resolution: Do not re-use online passwords, ever. Comcast had a large security breach last month, and now hackers have their entire list of customer emails and passwords, and some additional information that should have been properly encrypted, but wasn't. Comcast invalidated all the passwords, of course, and forced resets on everyone concerned. But now hackers have that list, and are quickly checking every email and password combination as potential logins for the top 100 or so banks, retailers, and online services, basically anywhere that can send a gift card digitally or that stores a credit card number, or has money in it. Anyone

who used their Comcast password anywhere else can expect to be hacked.

- Resolution: Don't search online for tech support phone numbers. The phone numbers that show up are to tech support companies that will remote into your computer and diagnose a trojan and offer to repair it for $400, or wipe out your files if you call them a fraud. For tech support phones, go to the main web site of the company you're trying to reach, and look for the 'Contact' page, and there you'll find the chat options, self-help, and maybe, sometimes, a call-back request link. Or just call me and I'll tell you the correct support phone number.
- Resolution: Don't call the phone number in any error message that pops up on your screen–it is always fake. Microsoft, and all the major software and hardware companies, don't pop up phone numbers like that, and don't want you to call them. Close the window with Alt-F4 (close), or F11 (exit full-screen mode), or Alt-Tab (switch Window), or Ctrl-Alt-Delete (task manager, and close the browser from that list), and if all else fails, hold the power button in for 10 seconds, and computer will turn off.
- Don't open attachments or follow links in strange emails without first looking at the email address that sent them. There are copycat emails that look like banks and mail systems, or are warning (falsely) that the attached file contains a payment or something very urgent. But these arrive from international email addresses, or link to Google forms, and lead to dangerous downloads. Delete them.
- Tax-season scams are starting. Reminder: the IRS first-contact process for tax collection is the USPS, as a mailed letter. It is never a threatening email or phone call demanding gift card numbers. Don't laugh; if it wasn't profitable for scammers, it would go away.

Updates

- Security breaches will be in the news more frequently in 2024, due to a new Securities and Exchange Commission rule that took effect in

December 2023, that requires all public companies to report data breaches as a government filing in just four days. I wish them luck; most public companies won't know they've been breached until their files are copied and encrypted weeks later. https://gizmodo.com/sec-rule-cyber-security-data-breach-cfo-reporting-days-1851114300

- And worse, ransomware authors have started reporting victims who don't pay up to government agencies. That's of limited value to them–the government discourages paying ransoms. https://techcrunch.com/2023/12/18/why-extortion-is-the-new-ransomware-threat/

- QuickBooks Desktop is officially gone for new purchases. The 2023 product was the last version of Desktop. It's still available as monthly subscription updates to existing subscribers, or as the Enterprise edition, starting at $1800 for 10 users, but Intuit wants everyone to move to the online subscription product. Again: The online QuickBooks is an entirely different accounting product than the Desktop product. If you're going online anyway, there are better options; ask your accountant what they would prefer for you to prepare your numbers with. The official cutoff date is July 31, 2024, but QB Desktop is already gone from online stores. More here: https://www.firmofthefuture.com/product-update/faq-desktop-stopsell/

Evolutions

- Google Chrome is killing off third-party cookies this year, experimentally, and slowly. Reminder: Cookies are small text files stored in browsers, that remember things like language choice and the contents of a shopping cart. The 'third-party' type shares data with other web sites and services, mostly for tracking you and serving highly-targeted advertising. Chrome is turning them off, but don't be fooled into thinking that the world's largest advertising company is not going to track you if you use Chrome. Cookies are just an old way to do it, replaceable with an IP address and a file stored on a central server, and that's not something easy to block. This is a 'wait and see' scenario. (To be continued.)

- AI continues to evolve. Windows computers that don't already have Copilot will see it soon. It's in Windows 11 23H2 now; that's the latest

feature update that became available just in time for Halloween. Copilot is Microsoft's interface for AI, and you can expect it to show up in Windows 10 soon. There are phone apps for it in both the Apple and Android app stores right now. Copilot is good now for advanced searches. It's not as good for creating new text content, because you still can't trust that the 'new' content isn't just scraped off multiple websites, merged, and reworded without checking the accuracy of each piece of the copied data.

- We've had CPU chips for decades (central processing units), APUs since 2017 (AMD processors that include graphics support), and this year, we will hear about NPUs. Neural Processing Units are still just a computer's brains-on-a-chip, but they're designed specifically to run AI software directly.
- AI computers will be a thing this year. Intel announced their 15th-generation Core Ultra processors in December. These new chips include neural processor features, for computers that will be able to run AI functions directly on PCs without relying on either online servers or high-end graphics processor chips in the computers' video cards. AMD is also readying AI-boosted processors. Expect these to start in the very high-end systems first.

Newsletter Calendar Change

PC Updater News will switch release dates next month, from the 10th of each month, to the first business day on or after the 10th. That means the next few issues will arrive on Monday, February 12th, Monday, March 11th, and Wednesday, April 10th.

For computer help, call 410-871-2877
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