'War drivers' cruising to cause trouble

Computer expert warns businesses to protect systems

By Aaron Paton
Abbotsford Times

If the words "linksys" or "default" ring any bells, your computer may be susceptible to attack from unscrupulous Internet pirates, identity thieves and people searching for child pornography.

Even encrypted connections are accessible with a few clicks and the right software, which is free and widely available on the Internet.

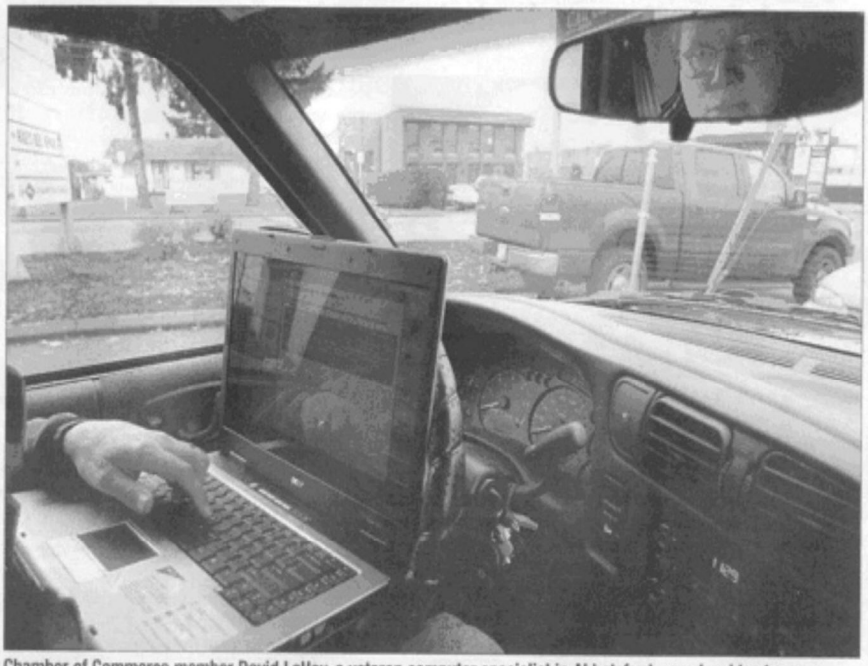
"They call it 'war driving,'" says David LaHay, a veteran computer specialist and member of the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce.

"That's when hackers drive around with laptops looking for open wireless connections."

From the safety of their vehicles they can access entire hard drives, browse through your files or steal your resume right out of the "My Documents" folder on your desktop.

Credit card and banking information is only slightly more difficult to obtain, with thieves hacking into your data streams to take what they need.

Others simply use your Internet to look at kiddy porn [for which you are liable] or make EBay purchases using stolen credit cards.



Chamber of Commerce member David LaHay, a veteran computer specialist in Abbotsford, says local businesses would be wise to have their systems checked out to ensure hackers can't steal info. – AARON PATON PHOTO/ABBOTSFORD TIMES

Most household connections have a radius of about 500 metres and with the proper equipment – they can be accessed from almost five kilometres away.

A little "war driving" revealed three open wireless connections and six encrypted within two blocks of the *Abbotsford-Mission Times* office on Peardonville Rd.

It took about 10 seconds for LaHay to determine that if he wanted to he could hack into the unencrypted connections using options built right into Windows.

He says there's about a "60 per cent chance" he could also hack into any of the encrypted connections with a little time.

Fortunately for Abbotsford business owners and anyone who has a computer, this former security alarm salesman and 25 year manager with BCTEL is on your side.

"It's easy for me to see how to protect against these guys, having seen people trying to break in for so long," LaHay says.

The problem, he adds, is that most people don't protect themselves at all and those who do encrypt usually don't use a firewall.

"Just like a home, you need layers of protection to keep your computer safe," LaHay says.

A complete service call costs $70, takes about 30 minutes and includes many layers of wireless security. He can also change the shape of your wireless connection, confining it closer to the walls of your home.

You will also need a good quality anti-virus program, firewall software and firewall hardware, an anti-spyware program [available free from Microsoft] and keep up-to date on manufacturers updates or "patches" for Windows.

Macintosh users are becoming more susceptible to "probing" because of the Lynex-based OS X.

"Macintosh users still make up less than one per cent of all the computers out there ... but Macs are 'virus spewers' because most Macintosh users don't have any kind of anti-virus protection."

For more information or to fine-tune your business security, e-mail dave@bturner.com or call (604) 996-5700.

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