

Tip 4

Protect yourself from harmful emails

Email is one of the easiest and fastest means of communicating via the Internet. It can also distribute harmful electronic viruses, worms and trojans through malicious code in attachments and commands embedded in apparently normal messages.

Email borne viruses, worms and Trojans are capable of harming your business computer system and with it your ability to conduct your business.

One of the ways to safeguard your computer systems is to be cautious about opening email attachments or clicking on hyperlinks in emails from unknown or questionable sources.

Installing a firewall is an important and effective first step (see tip 3) to prevent access to your network by unauthorised users. But firewalls do not check the content of email being sent and received by those authorised to use the computer. This means that email viruses, worms and trojans can still pass through this level of security.

Installing anti-virus software protects against most email viruses, worms and trojans. To protect against the latest threats you need to regularly update your anti-virus and firewall software (see tips 2 and 3).

What you can do

To protect against harmful emails:

- always use firewall and anti-virus software
- perform a complete virus scan on your computer at least once a week
- keep all filtering and security software up-to-date
- install security patches for all operating system software and application software and keep them up-to-date
- apply common sense before opening any email, especially if the title of the email attachment appears vague or unfamiliar
- be wary of opening email attachments especially from anyone you do not know
- be suspicious of email that creates a false sense of urgency, or that makes offers that sound too good to be true
- do not open web links in any email if you suspect that the email is vague or unfamiliar (often such emails trick you to download a virus, worm or trojan)
- use a filter to automatically scan your incoming email for spam (see tip 5)
- do not have an 'email preview' option as a default viewing option in your email inbox.

Further information

You will find useful information on the AusCERT website under 'Protecting your computer from malicious code': www.auscert.org.au/3352

You can find detailed information on the 'security' website developed by the Internet Industry Association: www.security.iaa.net.au