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## November 2019 Newsletter

### What is Malware?

The term malware is a contraction of *malicious software*. Put simply, malware is any piece of software that was written with the intent of damaging devices, stealing data, and generally causing a mess. Viruses, Trojans, spyware, and ransomware are among the different kinds of malware.

Malware is often created by teams of hackers: usually, they're just looking to make money, either by spreading the malware themselves or selling it to the highest bidder on the Dark Web. However, there can be other reasons for creating malware too — it can be used as a tool for protest, a way to test security, or even as weapons of war between governments.

But no matter why or how malware comes to be, it's always bad news when it winds up on your PC. Fortunately, that's what we're here to prevent.

### What does malware do?

All kinds of things. It's a very broad category, and what malware does or how malware works changes from file to file. The following is a list of common types of malware, but it's hardly exhaustive:

- **Virus:** Like their biological namesakes, viruses attach themselves to clean files and infect other clean files. They can spread uncontrollably, damaging a system's core functionality and deleting or corrupting files. They usually appear as an executable file (.exe).
- **Trojans:** This kind of malware disguises itself as legitimate software, or is hidden in legitimate software that has been tampered with. It tends to act discreetly and create backdoors in your security to let other malware in.
- **Spyware:** No surprise here — spyware is malware designed to spy on you. It hides in the background and takes notes on what you do online, including your passwords, credit card numbers, surfing habits, and more.
- **Worms:** Worms infect entire networks of devices, either local or across the internet, by using network interfaces. It uses each consecutively infected machine to infect others.
- **Ransomware:** This kind of malware typically locks down your computer and your files, and threatens to erase everything unless you pay a

ransom.

- Adware: Though not always malicious in nature, aggressive advertising software can undermine your security just to serve you ads — which can give other malware an easy way in. Plus, let's face it: pop-ups are *really* annoying.
- Botnets: Botnets are networks of infected computers that are made to work together under the control of an attacker.

## How to protect against malware

When it comes to malware, prevention is better than a cure. Fortunately, there are some common sense, easy behaviors that minimize your chances of running into any nasty software.

- Don't trust strangers online! "Social engineering", which can include strange emails, abrupt alerts, fake profiles, and curiosity-tickling offers, are the #1 method of delivering malware. If you don't know exactly what it is, don't click on it.
- Double-check your downloads! From pirating sites to official storefronts, malware is often lurking just around the corner. So before downloading, always double-check that the provider is trustworthy by carefully reading reviews and comments.
- Get an ad-blocker! Malvertising – where hackers use infected banners or pop-up ads to infect your device – is on the rise. You can't know which ads are bad: so it's safer to just block them all with a reliable ad-blocker.
- Careful where you browse! Malware can be found anywhere, but it's most common in websites with poor backend security, like small, local websites. If you stick to large, reputable sites, you severely reduce your risk of encountering malware.

Unfortunately, even if you follow the above advice to the letter, you might still get infected with malware: hackers have found ways to sneak their viruses into every corner of the web. For real security, you need to combine healthy online habits with powerful and reliable anti-malware software, like AVG AntiVirus, which detects and stops malware before it infects your PC, Mac, or mobile device.

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