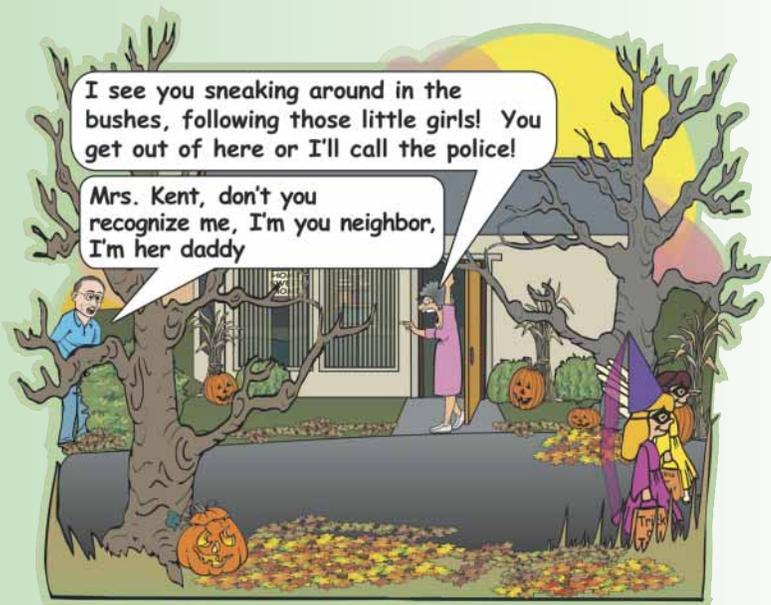By Linda Windler, Thoroughbred Systems, Inc.

# Computer Corner

## Internet Trick or Treating

Halloween was a huge deal when I was a kid. And, when my friend and I reached an age we believed made us old enough for a night of frolic by ourselves, I'm sure it made my folks uneasy. Of course we received a lecture on not venturing to far, only going to houses of people we knew, being back by a set time, being alert, and not talking to strangers. In addition, our costumes included reflective material, we each had flashlights, and our vision was not obscured by heavy masks. All factors for safety in trick or treating.

So, we bravely ventured into the dark of night. Probably what provided us with the best protection was that my dad was sneaking along behind us, hiding in the bushes to keep us from knowing he was keeping an eye on us. Years later we were told about an old neighbor lady that came out of her house to yell at him as we trotted off down the road. She chewed out the creepy old guy

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stalking those two little girls, threatening him that she would call the police! Poor dad, I don't think that particular Halloween was too much fun for him. Nevertheless, thanks to parents that went the extra mile for our safety, the night was a great treat with no tricks.

I spoke with a customer today who is so weary of the dangers of the Internet that he misses out on the good things the World Wide Web can offer. I suggested he take my parents' approach and use good sense and employ several safety measures to ensure safe excursions onto the Net.

All of us face unseen evils as we venture out onto the Web. Most do so using virus protection software, as they should, but there are other precautions to avoid the 'tricks' waiting out there. There are a bag of tricks, i.e., software applications, and our own behavior on the Internet, which can protect us from Internet "tricksters", who range from "just-for-the-fun-of-it" hacker pranksters to hardcore Internet criminals.

It is often people's behavior on the Net that attracts trouble. It's not a bad idea to follow a para-phrasing of the sort of rules my parents delivered in their trick-or-treating lecture. Don't venture too far, limit site visits to known trusted locations. Stay alert and sensible; don't be naive and foolishly trusting. Don't provide important information to strangers and don't open email attachments from people you don't know anything about.

Another factor in Halloween safety is sending the kids out with costumes that don't impair their vision and dressing them to be visible at night, each toting their own flashlight. For the computer user, a comparable bag of tricks would be running applications that help to keep a computer safe and healthy. While a person NEVER wants to have more than one virus protection software program installed on a computer, because multiple programs actually get in each other's way, there are other products to use alongside virus protection that help keep a computer in top shape.

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This brings us to some of the "Treats" one can access on the Internet. The main purpose of this article is to make people aware of helpful applications that can be safely downloaded for very little or even no money. Some can replace software that costs many times as much. The applications we will list here can all be downloaded to one's own computer rather than running programs on the cloud.

CNet Magazine is a widely respected hi-tech review and information service similar to Consumer Reports and their site www.download.cnet.com is great for safely finding and downloading a plethora of helpful products for little or no money. Of course, one can also go direct to software developer sites, but we encourage people to frequent the CNet Magazine site because trolling unknown sources can be risky.

## Avoid Web "Tricksters" with a "'Bag of Tricks", i.e., Security Products from www.download.cnet.com

**CCLEANER and GLARY UTILITIES:** Regular running of these "clean-up" programs, along with a good virus protection program like Avast or AVG can keep the goblins and ghouls of the Net at bay. Each comes in a basic version for FREE or an enhanced version for a nominal fee.

**AVAST** and **AVG:** A couple of the Free, Free-to-Try or Paid versions of Antivirus Software available for safe access at download.cnet.com: BitDefender, Comodo, Panda and more.

**EXPRESSVPN, NORDVPN, SURFSHARK:** Three of many products (among the top-rated) known as Virtual Private Network, i.e.,VPN software. For heavy Internet users and those engaged in high-risk behaviors, the free AntiVirus protection built into Windows 10 may not be enough protection. Such persons should consider a good Anti-Virus program and possibly a VPN.

A VPN keeps browsing habits private and data secure by creating an "encrypted tunnel" between a computer and the Internet. A VPN is highly recommended in public wireless locations or when connection to WIFI-6, IEEE 802.11ax standard wireless devices is not available.

For more information on VPN and other Internet security, see previous articles on these topics: KRWA's *Lifeline* March 2016 "Beware: Don't Get Bit" and July 2018 "Guarding Against the Dangers of the Dark Web and Other Cyber Dangers".

These are all highly rated programs, but they are only a few of the many security tools and popular software "Treats" available at download.cnet.com.

## Now for a Variety of Software Treats Available at www.download.cnet.com

**SEARCH EVERYTHING:** Referred to as "Everything" on the website. Most commonly it is used for its ability to find files and folders. Whether a file was created last week or last year, if the user can no longer recall what name it was saved under or where on the computer it was saved, this handy tool can come to the rescue to locate it. If the person can remember at least a part of the name, they may find it that way in seconds. If they remember nothing but that it was a document created a week ago, they may find it that way.

If one is searching for a particular photo but has no idea of the name or when it was done, but, they would recognize it if they saw it, they could ask the program to show nothing but pictures, then, if it is, for example, a JPG, they could type in .JPG, view all the thumbnail images, and scan with their eye down the display until it is spotted. Then, still using Search Everything,

double click to bring the photo up.

In managing files, for example, it's decided that a particular group of files needs renaming, the program can display just those desired files allowing them to be highlighted and their file names copied into a word processor where the names of literally hundreds of files can be altered from one thing to another in minutes using Find and Replace. A hundred photos that were named Kids on Halloween 001, Kids on Halloween 002 and so on could be changed in minutes to Children on All Hallows Eve 001, 002, etc.

For these tasks, and so many more, these tools are available FREE.

**APACHE OPEN OFFICE:** A popular option for those that are tired of giving money to tech giant Microsoft to keep up with the latest Microsoft Office Suite version. Or, for those not happy about now paying a yearly subscription for Microsoft Office 365. Only slightly different in appearance

and how it works, Open Office provides a word processor, database, spreadsheet, presentation software, graphics software and formula editor, and the ability to open and save in Microsoft file formats. FREE

**LIBRE OFFICE:** Another similar Office Suite known for its menus that are even more of the look and feel of Microsoft Office. FREE

**VLC MEDIA PLAYER:** For playing audio and video files in real-time and streaming modes. Professional features like being able to change the playback speed without altering the audio pitch. FREE

**MOZILLA THUNDERBIRD:** Powerful and versatile email program offers a range of options for PC users (not for mobile phones). FREE

*"Will you step into my Worldwide Web?"*

*Said the spider to the fly.*

## A Variety of Good Values from Other Sites

**SOFTMAKER OFFICE:** This is yet another alternative to Microsoft Office Suite with a shining difference. With this product there is NO stopping to tell the computer what format to import from or to save a file; instead it "Just Does It in standard Microsoft's latest 'x' formats". Also, unlike the others, this license covers five users, for both the standard version price of $79 and the professional version $99. See www.softmaker.com

**FLEXIPDF:** Create, edit and comment in PDFs quickly and easily. The FlexiPDF printer driver creates high-quality PDF files from inside any Windows program. FlexiPDF Pro adds built-in automatic character recognition (OCR) conversion of pages from the scanner into editable and searchable PDFs. $79 for PRO single business license or three (3) personal use licenses. See www.softmaker.com

**NITRO READER 5:** Create, edit, and sign PDF files. Great for creating virtual forms for customers to fill out and sign. List Price $179, known to go on sale as low as $79 (compare that to paying $15 per month for Adobe Acrobat Pro). See www.gonitro.com

**TEMPLATE TOASTER PRO:** A website design program allowing the user to easily design their own professional looking website or website template they can then use time and again. Usually when one uses the web design software provided by a website host provider, should one decide to change providers, they give up the work they have done. Not so with Template Toaster List price $149, which has been known to go on sale as low as $99. See www.templatetoaster.com

So. . . no need to be frightened venturing out on the Web when armed with the right safety tools. Go forth with a full bag of TRICKS to stay safe and collect some great software TREATS.

Watch for the next Computer Corner article about the new Windows 11. While Halloween will be long over when that issue comes out, readers may find some of the early information about the new product a little scary!

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