The Best List Of The Worst Things You Do On Your Mac

by Tera Patricks

We live in a complicated world. Our Macs help make life a little easier; certainly easier than our Windows-using relatives. Still, there are some very bad things we can do on our Macs. If it's not bad passwords and no backups, or worse, here's The Best List Of The Worst Things You Can Do On Your Mac.

We all know our Macs are not perfect. If we forget our login password, Mac OS X will not remind us what it is. If we don't back up our files, our Macs won't do it for us. When we get spammed with tons of email, our Mac won't tell us what to open and what not to open (it's getting better at determining which is which).

In fact, there's a list of really bad things we can do on our Macs; but we shouldn't. So, if you're doing some things on this list, please stop, please change something, please remember that I Told You So™.

The Best List Of The Worst Things You Can Do On Your Mac

1 - **NO Backups**. This can't be that hard but it's amazing how many people have 2,000 songs on their Macs; and 3,000 digital photos, and a few hours of edited iMovie movies. Wait. There's more.

Do you know how many people have thousands of important email messages, hundreds of reports and dozens of important spreadsheets? And no backup. Not CD, not floppy (what are those?), not DVD, not to another hard disk.

First, think of this situation: You walk in, turn on your Mac and nothing's there. What do you do now? The hard drive is dead. How valuable is the data that USED to be on your hard drive. How easy is it to backup these days?

2 - **Bad Passwords**. According to ArticSoft, the first thing to know about what makes a good Password is what makes a bad Password. For example; the worst are "password," or "abcd," or "1234," or "fred" or "boss" or your last name.

Why are they bad? Because, as ArticSoft says, "they are obvious, easy to guess, and just plain stupid." So, what are good passwords?

First, a good password should not be a dictionary word, should not repeat characters, long enough that it's hard to catch when you see it being typed.

Oh, and easy enough to remember.

This password-- "password"-- is very bad. This one is better: 29sponges52. Get the idea?

aloha34 is weak, while aLo3h4a is better. Here's a great one: j@z2$ax. Don't use that

one, though. It's mine.

How often should you change your password? How valuable is your information? The longer and more complex the password, the longer you can probably keep it. One more thing-- don't write the password down on a Post It sticky note and put it on your Mac's screen.

Easy passwords and no backups are what you'd expect in a Worst List, right? There's more where that came from.

3 **Opening Spam**. This applies to Mac users, but also (perhaps more) to Windows users. Do NOT open unsolicited e-mail messages or attachments without verifying source and checking content first.

In other words, spam is bad, don't open it. Windows users do that and spread worms and viruses to other users with a simple click. Mac users, in general don't have that same problem but other variants of the problem exist.

For example, if a spammer sends you a "scatter" email message that contains HTML and a graphic, they'll know when you opened and viewed that message. And they'll know the email address they sent you is good so you'll get more email.

For Windows users, opening a spam attachment is asking for trouble. For Mac users, it's asking for trouble, probably not yet, but sooner or later.

Don't do it.

4 - **Installing Applications**. Of course, this doesn't apply to legitimate apps such as Microsoft Word, updates to iLife applications, System Software Updates, and utilities. It's a prohibition more aimed at downloaded screensavers, games, un-tested utilities and shareware.

Even those applications could be trojan horse varieties and wipe a hard disk clean or render your computer useless.

5 - **Failure to Update System**. Even Mac OS X, for all its stability and dependability, and performance over previous Mac OS 9, and over Windows, needs critical updates. Some say it's wise to wait a few days after they're released before installing (just to make sure the update doesn't cause problems by itself), but you'll update sooner or later.

Windows has all kinds of security problems because it wasn't designed for the Internet in the first place, so security wasn't considered a priority. Fortunately, Mac OS X comes with BSD's unix roots and is considered one of the safest and most secure operation systems you can get. Still, some applications, like Safari or Internet Explorer, have security holes show up.

Critical updates are a must.

6 - **Connecting A Modem To A Phone Line**. While the same computer is already connected to a local area network. Messy.

7 - **Laptops Have Legs**. You love your PowerBook. You wouldn't trade your trusty iBook for any PC made. Remember, MOST laptops don't get stolen in public places, like an airport or car.

Most get stolen in the office or cubicle. Of all the laptops I've known of that were stolen, all but one was ripped off from a desktop or cubicle when no one was paying attention.

Pay attention. These things walk. Get a secure cable. When you leave the cubicle, put the laptop to sleep, close the case, even put something over it so it doesn't look conspicuous.

Put your laptop inside a pizza box, like This One. Hmmm. Yummy. And no one will pay attention.

8 - **Unplug The Computer**. They say the most secure computer is one that's unplugged. Think about that the next time there's an electrical storm; lightening. Not many surge protectors can handle a nearby lightning strike.

If you love your Mac and need the information stored on your Mac, unplugging it might be wise during a storm.

9 - **No Firewall Router**. This applies more to broadband Mac users than to dial up users. A firewall is built in to Mac OS X. It locks down certain communication ports on your Mac which prevents people of sneaking in. An external firewall can do the same thing and more.

They're often less than $100 these days and worth it if you're computer is left on while you're away and you're using a cable modem or a DSL modem.

10 - **Your Mistake Here**. OK, that's nine for me. How about one from you? What's the biggest, goofiest computer mistake you've ever heard of (or did yourself)?