Malware: The Ultimate Solution

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Malware has become epidemic on Microsoft Windows.

Over the past couple months, my computer support business has seen a tenfold increase in infections with no end in sight. While Microsoft and others can pour more money into fixing bugs, the proprietariosity* of proprietary software will always weaken its security.

In the past, many have tried to solve the malware problem by understanding the technology, user behaviors, and financial motivations involved. Looking at the technical side, one is tempted to add anti-virus software, setup a firewall, or sniff network traffic. Others would prefer to follow the money. Unfortunately, criminals already operate their own financial system made of compromised machines and accounts. That's why the best solution isn't more security software or tracking down bank accounts. We must lower the infection rate by becoming unwelcoming hosts.

Imagine freedom

We must shift away from buggy programs that are updated far too slowly. Malware writers require a steady stream of widely-deployed, long-lived bugs and proprietary software delivers. This entire class of software is broken. We can't fix it so it must be replaced.

Switching won't be easy. It will require learning new programs, new processes, learning to expect freedom and to shun lock-in. But we will reap some amazing benefits along the way. While we use technology to combat crime we will also make a social statement: It's ok to share. In fact, it's safer than relying on some centrally-controlled secret code.

You might wonder: What is it about free software that will make it different? It's not just swapping Word for OpenOffice, one program for another. It's replacing a process, a power structure, and a powerful monopoly with a community, a free software project, and vision of a cooperative future. While Microsoft may delay or never release a fix, a single OpenOffice developer can take the initiative and fix any bug they find. If a project gets a reputation for fixing security bugs quickly, malware developers will move on or find a new line of business.

It IS possible to be malware-free on a mass scale but it requires free software and infrastructure capable of quick updates. Don't let the free in free software confuse you though. It takes real time, real money and real expertise to produce free software.

Provide support

To win the malware war, we must switch to free software but we must also support the organizations behind the software. If you use Firefox, you can donate to the Mozilla Foundation. If you use OpenOffice, donate to OpenOffice.org. There are many projects that could use money to get better hosting, to hold a conference, or to hire people for the less glamorous side of free software development.

If you are short on money, donating your time and energy to a free software project can be equally effective and you may learn marketable skills in the process. Help with testing, documentation, promotion, fixing bugs, or writing quality code. Can you see yourself donating 0.1% of your income annually or an hour a week?

Achieve victory

If software is process made concrete and the Internet a revolutionary tool for cooperation, imagine their potential to eliminate malware together. Once you're done imagining that, join millions who enjoy greater security due to free software. Download Firefox and SumatraPDF or go 100% free with gNewSense or Trisquel. Security, after freedom, is our favorite thing to share.

* Proprietariosity (adv.): The quality in software of being proprietary. The program may not be run for any purpose on as many machines as the user wishes. The user may not make modifications to the program to suit their needs. The user may not make as many copies as they wish of the program. The user may not distribute their changed version of the program back to the community.