Winning the Online Battle:

How to Stop Spam, Viruses, and Hackers Dead in Their Tracks

By Greg Reynolds

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Introduction

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His consulting practice with Net Sense focuses on network security and project management for corporate clients. The Spam Virus Help web site is geared toward assisting home computer users.

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About This Book: "Winning the Online Battle: How to stop spam, viruses and hackers dead in their tracks" is work in progress.

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Introduction

The key to winning the online battle is to think ***medieval***. And no, that's not really as odd as it sounds.

You need to be a little Machiavellian – building up your castle walls, hiring the right gatekeeper, eliminating spies, and acquiring the cloak of invisibility – to win the online battle.

Then, once you have good defenses in place, you can protect easily protect yourself while you venture online as long as you keep your head about you.

And how do you do that?

Simple. You just use common sense:

- You don't leave the front door open at your castle.
- You don't let anyone in unless they know the password.
- You don't let spies leak valuable information.
- You don't let anyone see where you're going.

So how does that translate to staying safe online?

You put systematic procedures in place that watch your back. When you are connected to the Internet, no one can possibly keep up with all the communication process going on between your computer and the outside world.

However, by using a combination of specialized programs, you can put a multi-layered defense that monitors all the communications to and from your computer and keeps your castle safe.

Every online computer needs the following:

- Personal firewall
- Spam filtering
- Antivirus protection
- Spyware/malware detection

With these tools you can easily win the online battle and stop spam, viruses, and hackers in their tracks. The next few chapters will walk you through the basic concepts followed by chapters describing how

these products work, covering best practices, and providing detailed product information.

Building Your Castle Walls

In medieval times, castle walls provided a good defense against attackers. Sure, there were still some risks such as bad guys scaling the walls, sneaking in the gates, or shooting flaming arrows over the walls. But, all in all, living behind strong walls was a lot safer than being unprotected.

The same holds true today. Your computer is your online home and it needs to be a fortress to protect you from attack.

In other words, **PC = Home = Castle**.

So, how do you go about turning your computer into a fortress? You begin by building your castle walls. We'll get to guarding the gates, becoming invisible, and knocking off pesky spies in future chapters.

Start with a strong foundation

To build strong castle walls, you first need a good foundation. With your computer, that means having your hardware and software up-to-date, all the holes in your computer's operating system plugged, and any necessary patches applied.

Otherwise, your foundation will be weak because the building blocks weren't strong enough to handle the load. The unpatched operating system means the mortar was weak, causing holes and weak spots to be left in your castle walls.

Today's programs place more demands on your computer than ever before. You need a fast enough processor, sufficient memory, and a large enough disk drive to handle all the work. Otherwise, you won't have enough men to defend your castle.

Most home computers today come with enough processing power, but are woefully short of memory. Imagine defending your castle with soldiers who couldn't remember what they were supposed to do and had to stop and think about it before acting.

By then, things may have gotten out of control. Or, worse yet, everything will happen in slow motion as your computer slows to a crawl.

Windows computers need a ton of memory to handle the many processes they are running simultaneously. When you build your castle walls, you'll be adding even more tasks to their to-do list.

Do your computer a favor and give it sufficient memory to do all the jobs quickly and easily.

At a minimum, Windows XP systems should have 512k of memory. By upgrading your computer's RAM memory to that level, you'll ensure that every task is handled swiftly.

Likewise, having enough disk space is critical to your system's performance. Today's software programs are enormous compared to the programs in use a decade ago.

As you add more files to your hard drive, the response time slows as more data is searched to find what is needed. If you find your system slowing down, check and make sure that you have enough space available on your hard drive.

For more information about all the various performance settings to check and adjust on your computer, see the Chapter on "PC Settings - Best Practices".

Use the right building materials

Once a good foundation is in place, it's necessary to use quality materials to build your castle walls. The basic building blocks are:

- Hardware firewall
- Software firewall
- Antivirus protection
- Spam prevention

A computer firewall is simply a hardware device or software program that allows into your computer only the programs and data you decide are acceptable. Firewalls are the best defense a computer can have.

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