Java Security Issues

As you may have heard, Homeland Security is now recommending that everybody who doesn't absolutely need Java disable it in order to protect themselves against a zero-day vulnerability that is being exploited. Frankly, Java has consistently been one of the most popular attack vectors anyhow - so even when they fix this particular hole I'd be inclined to disable it and/or leave it disabled unless you really need it.

To that end I've put up quick articles on how to disable Java in the three major browsers. You can find links on my LawTech page here: http://www.officeforlawyers.com/lawtech.html (Free, of course)

Disclaimer: No, I'm still not a lawyer.

Ben M. Schorr, Arizona

Thanks for sharing this, Ben.

Should one also disable "JavaScript" (which appears at least in Safari on Macs)?

Brian H. Cole, California

From what I understand, Javascript is different from Java and you can
leave it enabled without the problems associated with Java.

Jonathan Schulman, Nevada

Javascript is probably o.k., but a good guideline for security is "If you don't need it...disable it." Your machine will be more secure and probably faster too.

You can always re-enable it later if you discover you need it.

Disclaimer: Still not a lawyer.

Ben M. Schorr

Speaking of 'faster,' am wondering what your guruistas have to say about this.

Do not recall where I learned it, but the instruction was to insert a thumb drive, preferably with plenty of G capacity, into USB port, which, with Windows 7 (and probably later) the computer will operate faster.

I tried it on a desktop which has Windows 7 and it does seem to function faster.

The thumb drive's red LED blinks a lot.

I think that function does not interfere with ability to backup/store files on the thumb drive. I have saved files to the thumb drive with that speed up feature operating and it seems to do fine.

Any comments or suggestions from you guruistas (okay to self-nominate; Ben Shorr is one for sure and there are a bunch more on this list)?

Rob V. Robertson, Texas

Rob, it's called ReadyBoost - lots of info here:
http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/magazine/ff356869.aspx

Ross Kodner, Wisconsin

Funny how one branch of the govt doesn't want us using java while another (the USPTO) requires it for electronic filings.

Kevin W. Grierson, Virginia

Which brings up my question. What does Java do so I know if I need it or can disable it?

Elizabeth Pugliese, Maryland

Ross is exactly right - it's called ReadyBoost and I strongly recommend it to my clients with Windows Vista or later that support it.

It's a GREAT use for that spare flash drive you got at TECHSHOW or somewhere else that's just been sitting in a drawer for the last year.

Disclaimer: Not a lawyer at any speed.

Ben M. Schorr

Java is used by sites to enable functionality in websites. Games, some applications use it to do stuff.

My advice, if you're not sure if you need it...disable it. If a site you use actually needs Java, it'll tell you. Then you can re-enable Java at least for that site.

Disclaimer: There is no try, only do. Or do not. When it comes to being a lawyer, I did not.

Ben M. Schorr

Yea, the US Army email requires Java.

Tom Crane, Texas

The most common attack vector for malware these days are scripts. Scripting includes Java, Javascript, etc.

One way to protect yourself is to install the NoScript extension on Firefox, or the ScriptSafe extension on Chrome.

Sites will be preventing from loading scripts of any kind unless you approve it.

It can be annoying at times to approve each site, but the upside is that you will be immune to script-based malware attacks. So weigh the pros and cons accordingly.

Michael Jack Kaczynski

On my Mac, Apple/Safari keep deleting and disabling the Java plugin, and there is no plugin for Chrome b/c Java is 64 bit and Chrome is 32.

I need Java b/c some stupid government sites require it.

David A. Shulman, Florida

If everyone disables JavaScript Google and Amazon will go out of business. Imagine the impact on their ad networks if javascript was not available on everyone's browser? No ads, good for us, no revenue, bad for them.

Mark J. Astarita, New York

Javascript =! Java.

David A. Shulman

The Java update is out, also. Updating Java is highly encouraged.

Darrell G. Stewart Texas

But re-enabling it is not.

Chris Tozer, Illinois