

Computer Bits by Mark Eggert of Raad One Network Solutions, Inc.

Welcome to Computer Bits, a series of articles on computers and network information. This month we'll take a look at a couple of items I've read about lately.

The first item is about a new technology called podcasts. A podcast is a new form of homegrown radio or television program that's delivered directly to your PC, iPod, or portable media player. These programs can contain viruses and other malicious programs such as spyware that can be installed on your PC when you download and play the podcast. The good news is that podcatchers, programs used to receive the podcasts, can be designed to detect and eliminate malicious podcasts. The bad news here is that media players like Windows Media Player, iTunes, Quicktime, RealNetworks, and WinAmp — have all suffered from serious security holes and may possibly allow the malicious podcast to infect your PC. This technology will need to be monitored to see if it will be used safely or not.

The second item also deals with a virus threat. All newer vehicles have at least one computer in them and now with some new entertainment systems and GPS systems installed in them with Bluetooth (wireless) interfaces, its possible that a virus can be introduced when a user connects to the systems with an infected device. While it isn't totally understood what will happen to a vehicle that is infected, you'll probably have to take it to a dealership to have the computer reset. It is said that the car manufacturers are aware of this possible problem and are working very hard to keep the computers safe. The good news here is that Bluetooth uses a secure interface and it also has a very short range, so the threat of drive-by infections really doesn't exist.

The last item is that Microsoft has released the first beta of Microsoft Vista, formerly known as Longhorn, to a select group of testers. This is Microsoft's next operating system (OS) and it's due to be released in the second half of 2006. By then Windows XP will be five years old which is the longest Microsoft has gone between major OS releases. It will be interesting to watch this over the next year to see if Vista is just a service release of Windows XP or a whole new OS. Also will Vista finally convince users to move away from Windows 98 and Windows 2000?

If you have a computer or network question you'd like answered and you think others would like to know the answer too, please forward them to me. My email address is meggert@wi.rr.com, my phone number is 262-679-7704 and my fax number is 262-679-7664.