



## **Series 5 – How Do I Access the Internet, Securely?**

Welcome back to a series of computer related articles brought to you by VistaSol Computer Solutions. Over the coming weeks we are going to be featuring articles based on the theme of 'How do I . . .?'

This week we're continuing our series of articles on the subject of 'How Do I Access the Internet' by exploring the increasing phenomenon of shopping on-line, and how to keep yourself secure. In our previous article I briefly mentioned an item of security called the Firewall, and as promised we are going to discuss that further in this article.

### **Part 2 – Safe Surfing**

This week we are going to be increasing your awareness of an often neglected form of security which is built into your operating system – the Windows Firewall.

#### **Firewall – What's that?**

The firewall sits between your computer's operating system and the internet and permits or blocks connections between your computer and other computers on the internet, according to rules defined by you (or in most cases, automatically by the Operating System). This will make it much more difficult for malicious programs to launch remote attacks on your computer.

You need a firewall because when you're on broadband; your computer is continuously connected to the global internet and identified by a unique number - its IP address. So it's potentially visible to anyone else on the network, and malicious users may be able to gain access to it.

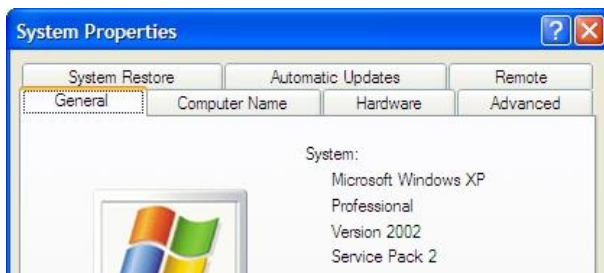
#### **How do I know if I have a Firewall?**

There are a number of factors which will determine whether or not you have a Firewall running on your system.

#### **Windows XP**

The Windows Firewall was first introduced on computers running Windows XP with Service Pack 2 installed. If you are running Windows XP, check to make sure that you have at least Service Pack 2 (SP2) installed (the latest Service Pack is SP3). To

do this, right click on the 'My Computer' icon (you'll find it in the Start Menu) and select 'Properties'. In the 'Properties' window (on the General Tab) you should see which Service Pack you have installed:



As long as it says Service Pack 2 or Service Pack 3, you are OK. If it does not have any Service Pack information, or Service Pack 1, this means you are not protected by a Firewall and you should seriously consider upgrading to Service Pack 3, either by yourself, or by contacting one of our technicians to upgrade this for you.

## Windows Vista and Windows 7

If you have Vista or Windows 7 installed on your computer, you will have a Firewall installed, as both these products have this in-built by default.

## Paid for Internet Security Products

In most cases, if you have paid for an 'Internet Security' product such as Norton Internet Security, McAfee Internet Security, or AVG Internet Security and installed this on your system; these each have their own Firewall software capability which will replace and disable the Windows Firewall. [*If you have one of these products installed, you can ignore the remainder of this article because this only applies to the Windows Firewall*].

## OK, you have a Firewall, but is it working?

If you who are using AVG Free, or some other similar free product, there is a possibility that even though you have XP with Service Pack 2 or later, your Firewall may be disabled. This can happen if you have fallen victim to an attack by a malicious program - 'malware'. Your Firewall may have been disabled by this malware program in order to open up your system for infection by other forms of Malware – this is the equivalent of leaving your front door open all day and all night! You may not even know that this has taken place.

## Enabled or Disabled?

Providing that your computer meets the requirements of having the Windows Firewall installed as discussed previously, it's quite easy to determine whether or not your Firewall is enabled. Open up the 'Control Panel' and look for the option labelled 'Firewall' (in XP this will appear separately, in Vista or Win 7, this will be listed under the heading 'System and Security'). If you know how to use the 'Run' command, you can also just type firewall.cpl in the run command to open the Firewall dialog window.

Check to make sure that the Windows Firewall is enabled – this will appear in Green for enabled, or in Red for disabled. If the Firewall is disabled there will be an option here to 'Enable' it (remember this does not apply if you have paid for an Internet Security product as mentioned earlier, because these programs disable the 'Windows Firewall' in order to run their own software).

If you are still unable to 'Enable' your Firewall, you may have been infected by some form of malware which prevents you from making any changes to the Firewall. In this case, you should download, install, and run 'MalwareBytes'. You can find a link to this program from our website ([www.vistasol.co.uk](http://www.vistasol.co.uk)).

I hope this clears up some of the mysteries surrounding the Windows Firewall, and that this will go a long way to keeping you secure on-line.

Enjoy your on-line surfing experience, but be safe and think about your security at all times.