

### **How Does a Firewall Work and How Can It Protect Your Computer?**

Using a firewall is one of the most highly recommended cyber security practices today. A good firewall, combined with up to date security patches and antivirus and anti-spyware software, will protect you from many Internet scams and threats that may come your way, including identity theft, credit card and other personal information theft.

#### What Is A Firewall?

A firewall is a barrier that protects a computer or network from anyone who tries to access it from outside without authorization.

The firewall scans everything that goes through an Internet access point and filters it based on customized settings.

There are two firewall varieties -- hardware and software. A hardware firewall is an actual piece of electronic equipment generally used by businesses with larger networks.

Most home computer users use a software firewall instead, which is a program running on your own computer that scans traffic going in and out through your Internet connection and stops anything that looks suspicious.

A hardware firewall is generally more secure, and since prices are coming down on them, some home users have chosen to set up one of these as well.

#### Why Do I Need A Firewall?

A firewall is critical if you have a permanent connection to the Internet, such as through a cable modem or DSL service.

With these "always on" connections, anyone who knows what they are doing can try to access your computer to run programs, access your information, or use your email to send spaham (misspelled intentionally).

Independent tests show that without a firewall, a standard PC that is connected to the Internet can be compromised in 10 to 20 minutes!

In the past, businesses have generally been more concerned about protecting their information, but now home computer users should use a firewall as well, since spyware, Trojans, and virus emails are so widespread and dangerous.

For instance, if you have your financial records stored on your computer, someone could access them and get all your credit card and banking information.

#### Is There Anything A Firewall Doesn't Do?

# ***VALLEY***

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Having a firewall installed does not mean you are permanently safe from any Internet attack. A firewall won't always stop a virus email, or adware or spyware from attacking your computer.

To protect from these you need to have up to date antivirus software installed, and a good spyware checker running.

However, a good firewall will go a long way towards protecting your computer and all your personal information from unauthorized access. We'll recommend a specific firewall in a future issue.