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Dan’s Desk

What happens in the downloading process vs. the saving process on a computer?

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This month I’ll take discuss a couple of topics that were passed along as suggestions. We really do want your suggestions for topics to discuss, so please pass them along!

Once you click on a ‘Download’ button within a page loaded in a browser, depending upon the specific browser being used and the default download settingselected in that browser, one of two actions can occur: the file selected to be downloaded will be automatically downloaded to the specified directory chosen in the browser settings ***or*** you will be prompted to ‘Run or Save/Save As’ the file to be downloaded. If ‘Run’ is chosen, typically the file will be downloaded to a temporary directory located under a hidden directory within your User Account directory, and then immediately opened/executed. If ‘Save’ is chosen the file will be downloaded to the default directory. The ‘Save As’ option will allow you to select which directory you want to save the downloaded file into. You may have to click on the drop-down list next to ‘Save” to see the ‘Save As’ option on some browsers. In the case of both ‘Save’ and ‘Save as,’ the file will not be opened or executed until it is selected after the download process has completed.

***How necessary is it to clear downloads?***

On Windows 10, under the System settings, there is an option for Storage. Within Storage, you can turn on ‘Storage sense’ which will automatically remove temporary files and empty the recycle bin when required, based upon your choices. With the large sizes of hard drives available these days, storage is rarely used up and therefore the presence of a 100 or more downloaded files will not be noticeable, unless they are each many gigabytes in size, such as with a movie file. In that case, you may want to move the files that you want to keep to external storage, such as a USB drive, before deleting them from the Downloads folder.

***Where are downloads stored?***

Depending upon your browser and the settings you have made within it, the actual downloads location can be anywhere. The common default is to use the Windows provided Downloads folder that is automatically created for you in Windows 8 up. This folder is part of the default set of folders created when you set up your account along with Desktop, Documents, Favorites, Pictures, Music, Videos, etc. My recommendation is to always use these default locations or a directory that you create within them. This way all backup programs and migration tools will always find your files and handle them correctly.

***Do downloads of docs and programs need to be saved even after installation or saving to a drive??***

As a general rule, no. The exceptions would be for programs that you purchase and may need to keep if the ability to download it in the future will expire, or if you want to keep the files for re-use on another PC or at another time.

***Can you itemize the security steps that all browser and email users should have checked in their settings?***

My philosophy with tailoring the settings within browsers is the same for what I tell 99% of all users (and which I follow myself) is to simply use the defaults for both the email and browser settings. Microsoft, Google, and other major browser OEMs have done a good job of recognizing the need to both protect the users of their products as well as the need to provide for good usability. You may have additional security tools in place that will also provide for screening of websites and email attachments which offer much higher levels of protection than what the browsers can provide.

***What encryption protections do providers utilize and are there specific ones that users should use in addition?***

If we are looking at web or email security, then the security and encryption are set by the hosting website. Typically when you log onto a financial institution, for example, you’ll see the web address uses the prefix of ‘HTTPS:’. This means that that website is using the SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) protocol to communicate, which is a layer of encryption employed by that site to protect the transfer of data.

I’m not a big fan of Hard Drive data encryption because of the number of times I have seen all sorts of situations where the loss of data has occurred. Encryption is normally used where a requirement to meet specific government or corporate standards is in place, or if privacy issues are present. Encryption also comes with a significant increase in processor usage, making many computers noticeable slower. Windows 10 Professional does offer BitLocker which can encrypt a drive or folders. If the key used to encrypt the data is ever lost, all data on that drive, or in that folder(s), may no longer be accessible.

If you have suggestions for other topics like this, that you would like to see explained, please let me know!