

Basic Tips for Safer Downloading at Work


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Download with caution: Think first. Click later.

Your computer should now be well-defended, although no technology can protect it against every danger. And that's where you come in.

Consider the following list before you click an attachment (or link) in an e-mail or instant message, download a file from a Web site (or a pop-up ad), or share music or other files from a stranger's computer.

1. Pause before you open attachments and click links

- Never open attachments in e-mail or instant messages from strangers. If you know the sender but the message arouses your suspicions here are some ways to identify fraudulent e-mails—check before you open the attachment. If they did not send it, delete the e-mail and ignore the instant message.
- Don't click links in e-mail or instant messages. (If you know the sender, check before you click.) The same goes for pop-up windows and banner ads. Be especially wary of clicking a link that accompanies a request for confidential information, for example a link that says **Click here...**
- Do not click **Agree**, **OK**, or **I accept** to get rid of a pop-up advertisement, an unexpected warning, or even an offer to remove spyware. Instead, close the window by clicking  in the upper-right corner of the dialog box, or by pressing Alt+F4 on your keyboard.

2. Only download from reputable sites

Not every Internet neighborhood is safe. Be cautious about downloading content from a Web site if you were referred there by e-mail from an unknown source. Also be wary if the site contains objectionable material, makes offers that seem too good to be true, or does not include a clearly written privacy statement.

3. Respect the law

Remember that the words, music, software, or video files you download are someone's original work. You risk serious legal trouble if you use copyrighted material without the permission of its rightful owner. Violating the federal laws that govern the use of this material can lead to fines and even jail time.

Illegal downloads could also have negative consequences for your company. For example, if you use pirated software on your company's computer, the company may be held liable. There are also some files, such as certain kinds of pornography, that are illegal to intentionally download, view, or own.

4. Install and use file-sharing programs cautiously

When you use file-sharing (also known as peer-to-peer or P2P) programs to trade music, video, and other files on the Web, you make some of your files available to others using similar software. Of particular concern to your company is that some programs share your entire hard disk drive by default, which makes anything there—including confidential corporate or personal content—available to anyone using the program. Even worse, using some file-sharing programs can also mean leaving an open back door to your computer any time it's connected to the Internet.

File sharing programs have other risks. The programs can themselves be purveyors of malware. Or, they may lead you unwittingly to download something that is illegal, such as a copyrighted song or certain kinds of pornography. These programs can also put your company's network at risk. Finally, some software can be next to impossible to remove after it is installed—if, that is, you can even find the program on your PC.

So share files only with people you know and trust. Some individuals share files they claim are music or movies, but are actually disturbing images, viruses, or worse.

5. Follow the rules of your company's acceptable use policy

Many companies have very specific rules about what you can and cannot download onto office computers, and there may be penalties for violating these rules.

6. Check the size of the file

If your company has many people sharing a single Internet connection, large files may slow Internet access for others and reduce their effectiveness on the job. If downloading a large file is not essential to your job, consider delaying your download until off-peak hours.