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**Updating your software is one of the best ways to stay safer online,  
says the US's top cyber defense advisor to NATO**



**Dr. Curtis Levinson** is the **United States Cyber Defense advisor to NATO**. We talked to him about basic things employees and managers should remember about being safe as you surf.

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**Aware Force:** Tell us some easy things to remember to stay safer.

**Dr. Levinson:** Well, the single most important thing is to delete every email message from someone you don't know. If you get an email offering a free coupon or a discount on something, remember, nothing is free. Think before you click. Don't open attachments from people you don't know or click on links in emails from unfamiliar names. There is no \$50 gift certificate. There is no free cruise. That's probably the single biggest thing to remember.

I say, don't keep thousands of messages in your in-box. Everything that comes in that would be considered spam, please delete it.

**Aware Force:** At the office, what are some things management should do?

**Dr. Levinson:** White listing is very important. So, blacklisting means everything allowed except things that are blocked specifically. White listing means everything is blocked except what is allowed. It sounds easy but it's difficult to manage.

The next thing is patching. Keep patches up to date. I understand a lot of us have legacy systems — if you patch something to the left, something to the right may break. But you have to stay on current versions of things. Bad actors know the easy way in and often it's through older versions of software.

Another thing management should do is deal with permissions. There are too many people who have system admin accounts, or in the Unix/Linux world, super-users. We have too many of those. We need far fewer people who can change a user ID. And those who do have them: they should be subject to a more extensive background investigation

**Aware Force:** Ransomware is new and evolving; what should you do to prevent the potential of your computer being locked and held for ransom?

**Dr. Levinson:** I'll say the same set of things I tell my mother-in-law. Delete spam. Delete messages before you click on link or attachment or reply to a message from unknown origin. There are no free cruises, no oil change coupons, no discounts to big box retailers.