

No. 211: LEAVE 'EM ON ALL THE TIME

By Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR
715 N Dries Street, Saukville 53080 (262) 268-1949
wb9rqr@att.net

There has been a long-standing debate among computer gurus concerning whether or not to shut a machine down when you are done with it for the day. These debates, among leaders in the industry, seem to pretty much split between those advocating "OFF" and those who say leave them "ON", 24/7. I won't go into all the pros and cons of that argument in this article, but there are cogent points on both sides of the debate.

In the past, I have been among the "OFF"ers. I figured that the savings in electricity and the time that the machine was not a target of malware (when off) made it a bit more desirable than leaving it on all the time. However, that has changed, owing to changes in Microsoft policy with regard to updates.

In the past, Microsoft had an update day on the second Tuesday of each month. As new updates were written and approved, they would save them up until that day of the month, when they would be released for manual or automatic downloading and installing. "Microsoft Tuesday" became a habit for all those who downloaded and installed updates manually. Most of those updates were security changes.

Recently, Microsoft abandoned that practice. My guess is that they thought the practice inserted too long a delay to wait for newly written security updates to be placed and activated, especially in the rapid-fire malware environment we live in today. They announced that all updates (security and others) would be released as soon as they are written and approved. They did not give the reasons I have guessed at above, but it surely makes a lot of sense that it was what they were thinking. And it is a good thing to reduce the delay in installing and activating security fixes.

Therein lies my change to keeping machines on all the time. A security update that is released by Microsoft at 2:00 a.m. can "find" your machine and get installed, but only if your machine is on. If it is not – if you just turn on your machine at 8:00 a.m. and turn it off at 5:00 a.m. – there may be a several hour (or even several day) delay before you get the update. That is a window of opportunity (no pun intended) for malware to strike.

Laptops especially consume very little power when left on 24/7. And both laptops and desktops consume relatively little power if you have the screen blank after 15 minutes. Don't, however, have your machine go to sleep or have it turn off the hard drive. Keep it awake 24/7. It does not need to sleep like we humans do.

One caveat. Do turn the machine off when going on vacation, or if you will otherwise be gone for several days. You can carry this "24/7 – on" thing too far! Happy Computing!

P.S. I just installed Windows 10 on my primary laptop, which sits on my desk next to my main machine. Looks pretty good! And, I was able to write an article and install backups from other machines to it, exactly the same way as I did before installation. I am encouraged. Stand by for more reports.