

Technology Corner

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This issue we answer some technology questions of importance to senior citizens that I have been asked. They are:

- What are “phishing” attacks
- How to care of CDs and DVDs

“Phishing” attacks

“Phishing” attacks are e-mail or web messages that seem to come from legitimate businesses – banks, credit card companies, online retailers, etc -- to you asking for personal information such as social security number, credit card numbers, name, address, etc. The message will often contain some kind of warning, such as your account is overdrawn or it may have been accessed by thieves. The message goes on to say that to be on the safe side the company has deactivated your account. To get it opened again they ask you to click on the web link and fill out the very legitimate-looking form that appears on the screen. The web page may look exactly the same as a legitimate business but with a slightly different web address. You are asked for information that proves who you are – not just your account number, but also your social security number, your drivers license, other bank accounts, and credit card numbers. With this information, the crooks, often in a foreign country, can empty your bank account quickly, max out your credit cards, and steal your identity. Never respond to a request for this information as responsible organizations never initiate this kind of request. Only provide this information if you initiate the transaction.

Care of CDs and DVDs

Compact disks are sturdy, they last longer than most media, and they are not affected by magnetic fields. But like other media they can lose data too, so they need some care. Here are some tips to preserve them.

Keep your CDs at room temperature. Since they are made from plastic, exposure to direct sunlight or temperature higher than 120 degrees can warp the CD, making it useless. Compact disks do not use magnetic technology to store the data and, unlike floppy disks, they are not affected by the X-ray machines in the airports.

Avoid putting on stickers, labels, or tapes, or writing with regular ball point pens on CDs. Use labeling kits instead. Misuse of the label side (top) can damage the data layer right under the top surface. If you need to write something on the label side use soft felt-tip markers.

Be very careful while handling CDs. As their media area (bottom) is exposed, they are very vulnerable. Protect your CDs against dirt and scratches. Do not touch the bottom (data) surface.

Don't use any solvents or liquid cleaners as these can harm the plastic casing. Never clean the label side of a CD. This can cause more damage, as the data is actually stored right under the label of the disk. CDs should be cleaned radically. Start from the inside of the disk, move outwards rubbing in straight lines and not circles. Cleaning in circles can cause long scratches over a single section of the data track causing signal loss. But small radial scratches can be handled by the error correcting capabilities of the drive.

Don't expose your CDs to liquids. If you do happen to spill something on it, rinse it with warm water, and wipe it off with a soft cloth. Don't use hot water or a coarse cloth.

Bending a CD can be dangerous. They tend to shatter, sending shards of sharp plastic in all directions. Also, bending can cause the layers in the CD or DVD to separate and lose data.