



Securing your business

Firewalls are now an essential part of connecting to the Internet. Without them, there is no doubt that you will gain a Trojan, computer virus within a very short period of time or possibly even hacked. However these days, they are a little more complex and can cause issues, so I'm going to explain a little bit about how they work and what they can do for your business.

How they work

All computers communicating across the internet use ports on your computer, each different Internet task you do on the machine will go through a different port. Imagine ports as a number of doors on your computer, different types of information go in and out through various doors. FTP files go through door number 21, websites go through door 80, email goes through door 110/25 and so on. This becomes important because without a firewall, all these doors are open allowing anything to go in and out. A firewall locks these doors and only allows certain doors to remain open. If you shut all your doors, you would have no Internet connection at all, nothing would work.

Types of firewalls

Software firewalls are installed on to your computer and monitor and block ports. They will sometimes request to block a port now and again if it thinks something unusual is going on. If you allow your computer to block anything without reading the message, you may find that it has enthusiastically blocked a port, for example 110 which would then stop your email from working. This is one of the main causes of email failure and a common support call we encounter.

Hardware firewalls are placed between your computers and the internet connection. The firewall will only block what it is set up to block, which means configuring it correctly is important, but once it has been set up, it requires little maintenance. Ensure you only open up ports that are required, or the firewall can become pointless.

Hardware firewalls can now be purchased with VPN (virtual private network) capabilities. This allows you to log onto your network from anywhere else in the world securely. Your computer creates a direct connection to your work place network, it gets given a local work place IP address and then acts like another computer in your work place, so you can share files, connect to databases etc. It's a great tool to enable remote workers or even if you want to put in a few extra hours but don't fancy staying in the office.