

## **Do I Need a Firewall?**

I think the more appropriate question would be, “What kind of firewall do I need?” Surfing on the internet without an anti-virus program is just asking for trouble. Surfing without a firewall is just as bad, if not worse. So what does a firewall do?

First of all there are two types of firewalls. Software and hardware. I personally wouldn't give you a nickel for ANY software firewall. Any software solution is vulnerable to hacking and therefore risky. There many viruses out there that can easily disable a software firewall. Also software firewalls can really slow down your computer and can be really annoying with all the warnings they display. However, if you are still running on dial-up internet, this may be your only option.

If you are on either cable or wireless broadband internet then you should have a router (which has a built-in firewall) installed. A “hardware” firewall of this type basically hides your computer from would-be hackers. Over the last year several vulnerabilities (or holes) have been found in windows 2000 and XP. These “holes” allow hackers to snoop around and manipulate your computer over the internet. A firewall blocks access to these “holes” by hiding your IP address from anyone on the internet. The router talks to the internet with its own IP address and then feeds the required information to your computer via an “internal” or “private” IP address which is not visible from the internet thus protecting your computer. Please note that a router/firewall does NOT prevent or stop viruses, spyware or SPAM.

If you are on cable or wireless I HIGHLY recommend you get a router immediately. A standard router can be had for about \$50 at any computer store or Wal-Mart and is definitely worth the money.