1-Minute Newsletter – Mar/Apr 2014

This is the second installation of our 1-Minute Newsletter – we hope you find it helpful!

Firewalls and how they affect Your Workflow

You know what a firewall does, right? Yes, it's supposed to protect you from bad things that are trying to invade your computer. The trouble is, however, that firewalls don't know "good" from "bad" – they're not smart. They only know "foreign" from "existing." And their job is to keep "foreign" things out, regardless of whether YOU think they're okay. In fact, the firewall doesn't care what you think at all – it just goes about its job keeping "foreign," unknown things from getting to the good "known" things on your computer.

So you might ask some questions, such as, "*Can a firewall affect a software update?*" Well, think about it a second – what is a software update trying to do? Answer: it's trying to put *new* software on your computer. To the firewall, that new software is "foreign" because it's never seen it before!
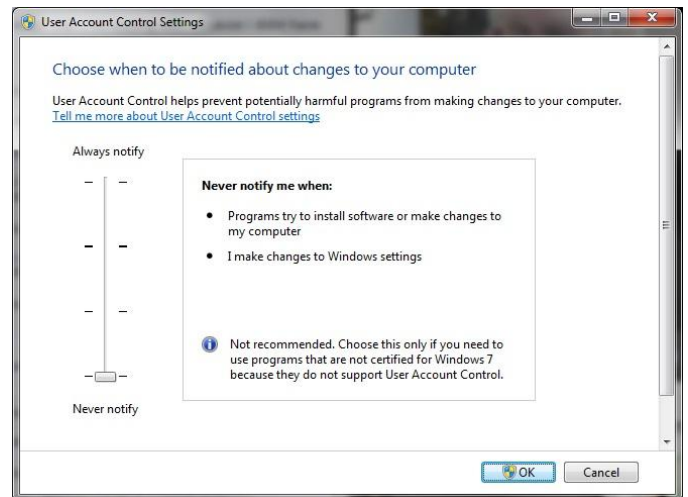
User Account Control

The #1 headache for corporate MIS departments is this "feature" that Microsoft added to Windows starting with their failed release of Windows Vista. Their engineering department has seen fit to keep it in Windows 7, Windows 8 and even Windows 8.1. (Lucky us. Somebody send me another bottle of Tylenol…)

UAC works. It really does. Except it works TOO well. And when it's on, it just blocks things from working and often doesn't give you any indication that it's blocking. However, sometimes it does and it usually shows up as a "Permission Denied" or "Sharing Violation" error message.

For example, we often use the Windows Clipboard's internal memory area to temporarily store a piece of information so that the information remains available when you start a different module. This is a rather common practice and in fact, was designed for that very purpose. When you "copy" and "paste" things on your computer, you're using the Windows Clipboard's memory space. But UAC can protect this special memory area and prevent a program from using it. It won't cause problems if you're using Microsoft's programs, of course, because they created UAC and know how to get past it (but they're not telling anyone else how to do that programmatically). Consequently, Club Office can get tripped up, sometimes not work properly or not work at all.

So what's the solution? Easy: change UAC's setting! The simplest way is to click START, then HELP, and type USER ACCOUNT CONTROL into the help panel's search box. You'll receive many options, one of which will be "Turn user account control on or off." Select it and continue with a secondary link to "Click to open User Account Control Settings." You'll then get the UAC screen (above).

"How about if I replace an old computer with a new one, will the firewall affect that?" Again, think about it a second. A new computer on your network has a "new" computer name and a new internal network name. To a network server, for example, its firewall is going to say, "Hey, an unknown computer is trying to get to me – I must protect myself from intrusion!"

"If it creates so much trouble, why do I want one?" Well, data and software security is part of our everyday world and it's not going away anytime soon, if ever.

"Can't you write your software so it goes through the firewall automatically?" No, because when the firewall sees "foreign" it just blocks whatever it is. You need to make friends with it and learn how to configure it so that your desired applications can work through it.

We turn UAC off on all our computers by sliding the selector all the way to the bottom and clicking OK. You must restart the computer to have the new setting take effect. This gives us an enjoyable, hassle-free computing environment – one that we're sure you'd enjoy, too!

Topics for future issues…
PATS, Tip Splitting Ideas and Tools, Cloning Registers, Shared Printer vs. Network Printer, Network Mapping, FTP ideas, the "Cloud," more…