Tech Tips: Use Domains to Avoid Computer Attacks

This is my favorite computer security tip. It can save you a lot of grief. It applies to all computers, phones, and tablets – no matter who makes them or what software they run. Anybody can do it. And it is free.

We are careful of where we are when traveling. We assess the neighborhood around us and decide whether we are relaxed, on guard, or need to leave quickly. The same should be true when we visit the web.

Every web page must have a unique web address, called the "URL" (Uniform Resource Locator). The most important part of the URL is the "domain" (also called the "domain name"), which is owned by the person or company serving the web page. The domain for our website is "snowdenoverlook.com". Use the domain to decide whether you want to visit a page. To find the domain:

- Look at the web address (URL).
- Find the first single slash "/".
- Using _periods_ as a separator, go back two words.
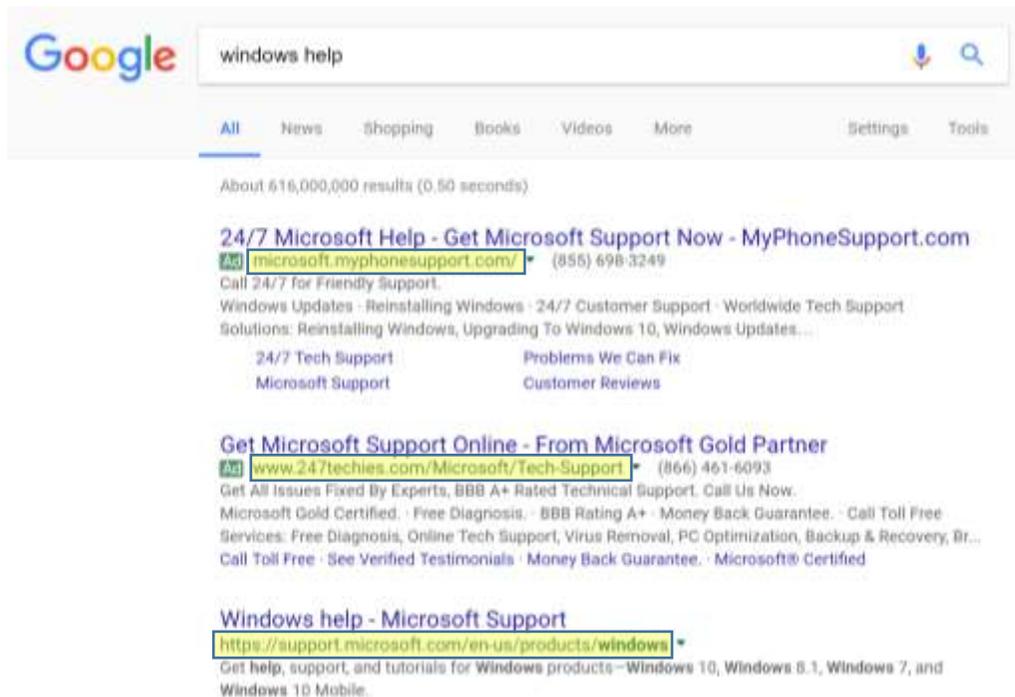
Here's some examples from a search for "Windows Help".

microsoft.myphonesupport.com/ - "mphonesupport.com" has nothing to do with Microsoft.

www.247techies.com/Microsoft/Tech-Support - "247techies.com" is also not Microsoft.

https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/products/windows - "microsoft.com" this is help from Microsoft.

https://support-microsoft.com/en-us/products/windows - "support-microsoft.com". This is not Microsoft. (The period was replaced with a dash, which does not separate words.)

Which of these sites should you visit? It's up to you, but I am suspicious a company who tries to trick me into thinking they are Microsoft. When reading the domain, use a sharp eye. Be on the lookout for misspellings, abbreviations, and other tricks somebody might use to confuse you.

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Here's another tip. Beware of clicking on web pages. Every click gives the web page permission to download something to your computer. It might be what you want. It might include something you don't want. There's no way to know for sure ahead of time.

Don't click on a web page unless you trust the domain. Different browsers have different ways to help you do this, but they all display the URL in a window at the top of the page. I recently did a search for "National Weather Service" and clicked the first link without thinking. Here's the page I came to. It wants me to click the blue "Get Weather Forecast" box. Once I click it, the site will download something to my computer. Should I click the blue box?

Look closely at the top of the screen.
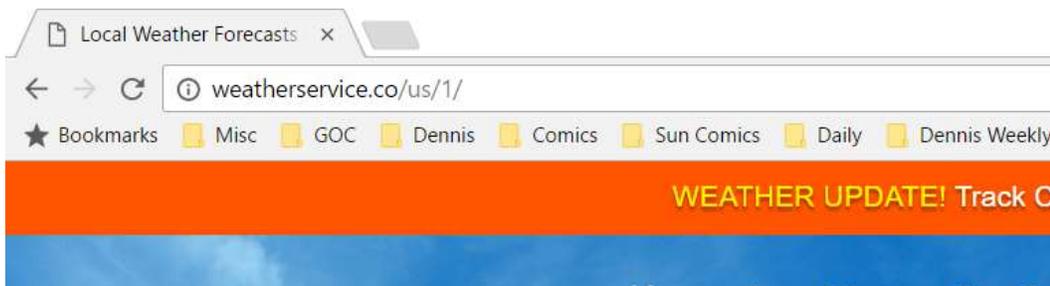
The URL is weatherservice.co/us/1/. The domain is weatherservice.co.

I don't know who owns this domain, but it's certainly not the National Weather Service. I didn't click. Who knows? Maybe I saved myself a lot of trouble.

If you have a tech tip question, feel free to email me at deichenlaub@gmail.com. Look for this and other tech tips on our website. Click "Admin", then "Tech Tips".