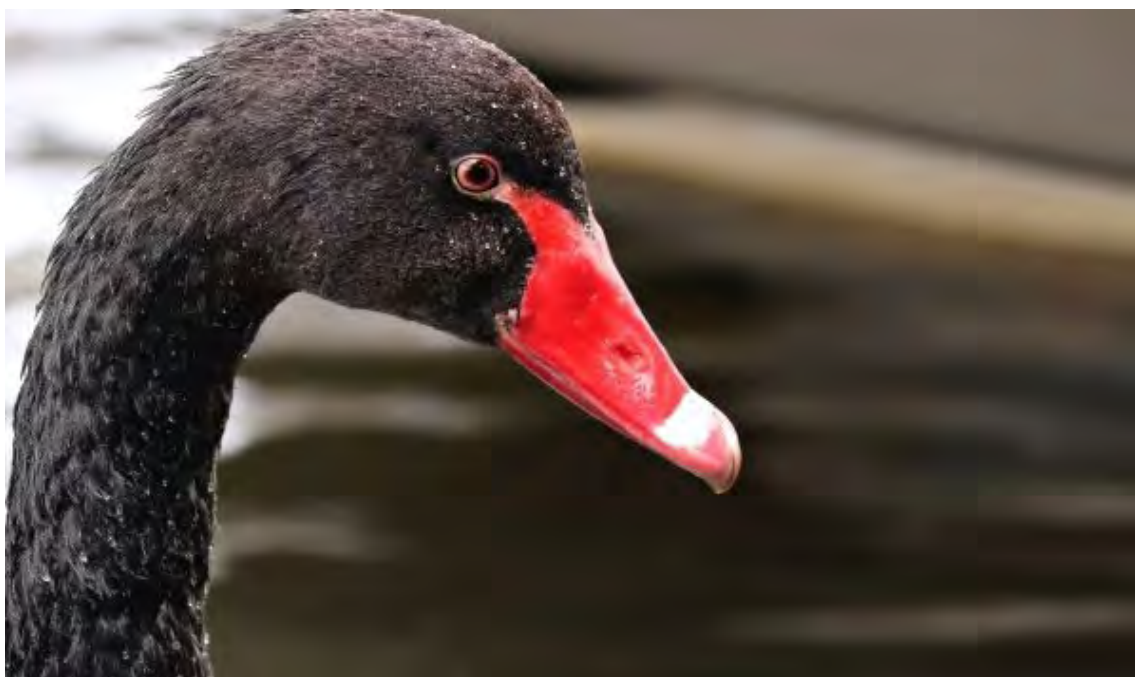# Coronavirus: The Black Swan Arrives

Yes, the Black Swan has landed. That's the unexpected event that we should have planned for, didn't, and hope that our standard and generic disaster-proofing plans will handle it. We expect white swans and thunderstorms, but it's harder to plan for what's unknown. I've written about Black Swans, and what they represent, here: https://www.startupware.com/field-reports/black-swans/

So this black swan is the Coronavirus, or more specifically, COVID-19. I won't pretend that I am still a Hopkins pre-med student--that was decades ago. But there are tech issues in a pandemic. Some of them are just normal planning for superstorms, blizzards, and floods, but there are also cyber issues.

Where Not To Read Medical Reporting

I've commented on the poor state of computer reporting here before. Basically, don't trust computer OR medical information coming out of local television, no matter what the apparent source. All the local stations tend to report press releases as news when it's three days old, and to shorten and rephrase what the news services report badly, either missing the point or completely mis-stating it.

Facebook has no news. It has unlabeled mixed-up slop of what might be news or paid political-speak, and lots of noise. Twitter is somewhat better, but pay attention to whose writing you're reading, and ask why someone would pay to 'sponsor' a post on an emergency topic.

The all-day news networks CNN and MSNBC, when they can find time to report on anything that isn't politics, are interviewing the right experts, mostly, but they "balance" those facts with reporters interviewing each other and politicians talking about topics they want to influence, but don't understand. Finding the interviews with actual doctors on their web sites is basically advertising dodgeball and pop-up whack-a-mole, so I would go to the real sources first, below.

Where to Read Medical Reporting

The best sources for medical news are the agencies that report it officially. Some of what you will find there will be medical technobabble, but they're pretty good about creating executive summaries that anyone can understand.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, includes travel health notices, and information about COVID-19 spread, prevention, and treatment.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html
https://twitter.com/CDCgov
https://twitter.com/CDCemergency

Maryland Department of Health PHPA: Prevention and Health Promotion Administration: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak at the Maryland Department of Health
https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx

FDA: The Food and Drug Administration has a lot of information, dealing mainly, so far, with the supplies of masks and diagnostic materials.
https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/mcm-issues/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19

WHO: The World Health Organization is reporting extensively on COVID-19. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Hoax Emails

The bulk scams are already arriving as fake Coronavirus warnings leading to online forms. Any message from the government that asks for any personal information of any kind is a fake. They don't contact us that way. That applies to the April 2020 Census, too; the Census information will arrive by mail, or in some areas, as a Census worker with a form, not by email.

Hoax emails of all varieties also depend strongly on False Urgency Syndrome and False Experts. They tell you that you MUST click NOW, and someone famous says so, and it's oh so important. Well, no, it's not, because again, that's not how official information arrives: It's not behind a link that goes to a web site outside the US, or even a .com address. Those are all fakes. Delete the emails; go direct to the source, above.

There's more online about the scams, and the usual basic security advice, at Homeland Security's CISA site, part of the National Cyber Awareness System: https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/current-activity/2020/03/06/defending-against-covid-19-cyber-scams
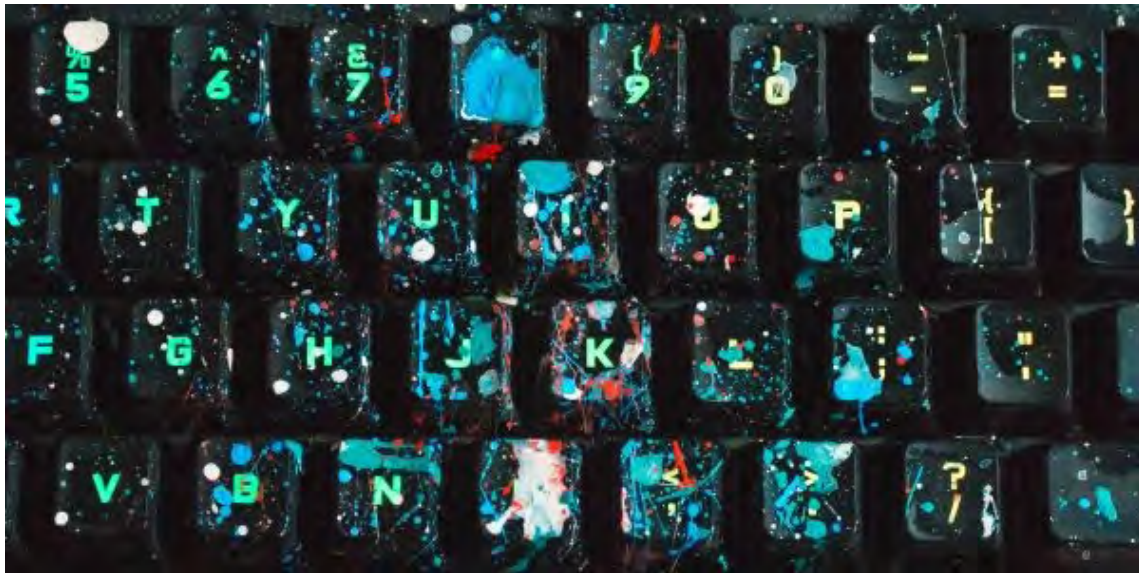
Cost and Shipping of Imported Goods

While a lot of computer technology is designed in the USA, it's mostly built in China, although the vendors have attempted to use Chinese production for Asia and electronics built elsewhere for export to the USA. But that's meaningless when world demand of any item is greater than can be produced by all open plants that have working shipping routes. Electronics change so fast that vendors do not carry backup stock; that defeats the whole purpose of the "just-in-time" manufacturing model that allows them to make money on products whose prices drop every year.

Hard drives are mostly from Thailand. When the floods hit Thailand in 2011, all hard drive production there stopped, and hard drives were not being made elsewhere, because some parts were only available from the plants in Thailand that were under water. The issue then, and soon again, is that computers require a specific list of parts to build. And those parts include other, smaller parts, and some of those sub-systems are not being built at the usual capacity, not being shipped, or being allocated to just a few vendors.

At this point, I'm seeing more than the usual out-of-stock conditions on parts, and fewer new computers of all types to choose from, compared to a few months ago. Prices are up slightly on some items, 10% to 20% so far. If you need a new computer, ask me for a quote as usual, but be advised that you will have to decide quickly among products that are actually in-stock. Selections are changing like it's two weeks before Christmas, and that's just not normal in March.

If we run into real issues with availability, I have multiple Windows 10 computers here that have been refurbished and upgraded to solid state, still have plenty of use left, and are cheap enough for companies to loan out or give to employees for remote access.

Office Issues

Washable keyboards and mice are now an employee benefit. Just unplug them, spray them with a little spray cleaner and rinse them under warm running water, shake off the excess and let them dry. Keep the ends of the USB cables dry. You can buy them on Amazon: Get Kensington or Logitech for keyboards. Washable mice are available, but the brands are total unknowns; read reviews first and always.

Teleworking

Remote work has come a long way since modems. I have offices that work remotely all day long, or manage an office from out of state. It's even possible to remote into a two-monitor system from another two-monitor computer. Working from home benefits everyone during an outbreak, even if it's only practical, on average, for around one-third of most employees, nationwide.

The business-grade product I recommend is Splashtop; it allows you to control which computers each employee can log into, and to make changes in access at any time, without having to be in the office yourself. The setup is easy, but call me if in doubt. They have multiple products; look at the 'Splashtop Business Access' product. Their tech and billing phone support are both excellent and quick; I've never needed a call of over 5 minutes with them. The Splashtop link here is to an offer for an extra 30 days on your subscription, and there is a 2-week free trial.

As always, if you allow remote access to your office computers, or allow company email access on home computers, require strong antivirus (endpoint security) software on those devices.

I will be working remotely, as always, if we have government imposed 'stay home' requirements. I can even setup your remote access remotely.

Plan ahead. Be safe.

For computer help, call 410-871-2877
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