

Don't fall for e-mail hoaxes

A quick reality check is all it takes

No doubt you've seen dire warnings such as these in your e-mail or on Facebook posts; A virus that was just discovered will burn your hard drive, or calling a certain area code will put huge charges on your phone bill. Fortunately, there's an easy way to find out what's real and what's rumor. Simply go to one of these myth-busting web sites and search using a few keywords, such as "virus burn hard drive".

Snopes.com. It now sports ads, including a pop-under browser window. But Snopes.com, named for the nefarious family in William Faulkner's novels, is probably the most popular and trusted online watchdog. Entries are well researched, with original sources whenever possible, and a judgment of the veracity of the rumor is provided.

UrbanLegends.About.com. One of the longest-running myth busting sites, Urban Legends gives you a "status" (false or dubious for example) and provides analysis. It's fun to check out the top 25 hoaxes and the latest additions.

Hoax-Slayer.com (don't forget the hyphen). This relative newcomer has fewer ads than the others. It organizes hoaxes into topics such as charity and celebrity hoaxes and bogus warnings. It covers most of the bases.