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WORKING SMART

November 2004   Volume 1, Issue 2

- Install anti-spyware software and configure it to automatically download updates , enable real-time monitoring, scan your computer weekly and when it boots.

- Read the End User License Agreement before downloading software.

- Be Wary of Peer-to-Peer file sharing services.

- Do not download software except from reputable sites.

- Be wary of unknown web sites and do not click on pop-up ads.

- Set your browser to prompt you before it installs ActiveX controls or Java Applets.

- Do not open e-mail that is from an unknown source

- Keep your operating system current.

- Run anti-virus software and enable automatic virus definition updates.

Is Someone Spying on You ?

What is spyware?

Spyware is a program that tracks information about you, usually without your knowledge, and transfers the information to the author of the program. I have seen estimates of the number of spyware programs that exist ranging from 1,700 to 78,000. That is a wide range, but the point is that spyware is everywhere. The information these programs gather varies from the web sites you visit to passwords and credit card information.

How do I know if my computer is infected?

Some signs of infection include a decrease in the speed of your computer, bookmarks added to your browser menu, your browser launches a new home page and shortcuts are added to your desktop.   It is possible that you do not notice any signs of infection and still have several spyware programs on your computer. Simply clicking on a web site may be all it takes to become infected.

It is very likely that your computer has at least one spyware program. The best way to know is to run anti-spyware software.

How do I avoid spyware?

Anti-virus software is a must to ensure your security, but it will not shield you from spyware. Make sure you install anti-spyware software on every workstation and configure it properly to ensure protection.

Only download software from reputable sites and read all End User License Agreements first to make sure you are not agreeing to the installation of spyware. This is particularly true of freeware, shareware and Peer-to-Peer file sharing services. Be wary of visiting unknown web sites or clicking on any pop–up ads except to close them.
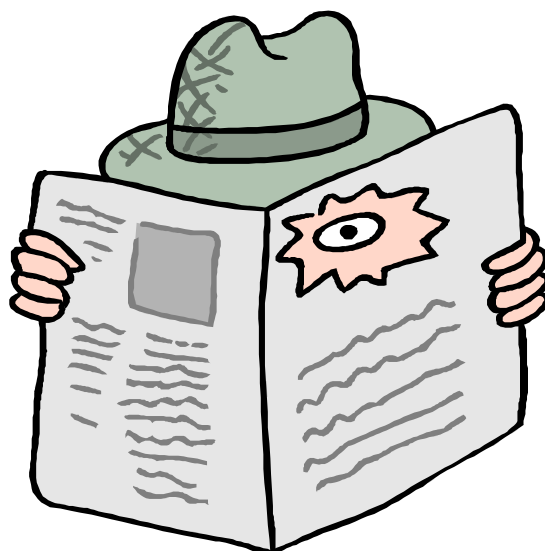
Make sure the security settings in your browser are properly set. Since spyware can also travel via e-mail, do not open any mail that is from an unknown source.   Keep the operating system on your computer updated with the latest version.

Which anti-spyware should I choose?

continue on reverse

Is someone spying on you? (*continued from reverse*)

There are numerous anti-spyware programs on the market and many are free. A product that has consistently gotten good reviews is Spybot Search & Destroy by PepiMK Software (www.safer-networking.org). This program is free. At the current time this product seems to lead the pack; however, no product will remove all the different variations of spyware. Many people run a second anti-spyware program to remove the spyware not caught by the first program.

Another anti-spyware pro-gram is Ad-Aware SE from Lavasoft. The Personal version of their product is free and is available at www.lavasoftusa.com. The Plus Version is $26.95 and allows you to block spyware in real time. The Professional Version of the product is $39.95 and gives you more detailed configuration options such as scanning across a network.

Be aware of dangerous habits that can get you in trouble

A product you should definitely consider is Spy Sweeper by Webroot. It costs $29.95 when ordered direct at www.webroot.com. The real time spyware blocking capabilities of this program are note worthy.

This is a small sample of the many products available.

In conclusion

Anti-Spyware software may not remove all the spyware on your computer. If you notice that the symptoms persist after running a couple of anti-spyware products, it is probably time to call an expert. It is not uncommon for our technicians to spend hours manually removing spyware that is not removed by anti-spyware software.

The Internet contains many hazards so travel with caution. Software can add a great degree of protection, but you also need to be aware of dangerous habits that can get you in trouble. ∎

For more information about the anti-spyware products discussed in this article as well as a short video on each product, go to :

www.pccrich.com/resources.htm