

Guard Your Privacy: Get Rid of Spyware

Many computer users believe “freeware,” or “shareware” is the greatest known invention. You download programs for free, in exchange for having some banner ads installed on your computer.

But, with the free program, you download tracking software, which is installed on your computer. The tracking software is an independent program that can monitor keystrokes, scan files, track Web surfing habits, and countless other activities.

The information gathered is sent to a remote location over the Internet. The data can be used in a variety of ways and may be sold to other parties.

The tracking software is Spyware, alternately known as advertising-supported software (adware).

Many don't mind Spyware

There are plenty of computer users who find it a fair exchange: free software for personal information.

However, some people find Spyware an invasion of privacy.

What's more, Spyware poses some concerns about security. Spyware programs reside on your PC and have all of the privileges of other programs that you install, which means these programs are authorized to be there and won't be detected as a virus.

The information gathered about your computer use is sent over the Internet to a remote location. The computer user has almost no control over the kinds of data gathered—and certainly none over who sees the data.

How do I protect myself?

You can take action against Spyware.

First, think hard the next time you consider installing a “free” software program. If you are averse to having tracking software installed on your computer, it might be worthwhile to purchase the software.

In addition, check the freeware for Spyware by running SpyChecker (see the “Resources” section). SpyChecker checks a constantly updated database to see whether the freeware program you are interested uses Spyware.

How can I get rid of Spyware?

Think you may have Spyware installed on your PC now? Want to get rid of it?

There are programs that detect the presence of Spyware, and some can remove it.

The “Resources” section lists a number of programs that might be of use. Check them out:

Resources

Ad-aware is a free utility that scans your memory, registry, and hard drives for known Spyware and lets you remove it safely. <http://www.lavasoftusa.com>

SpyChecker accesses a frequently updated database and will tell you whether a freeware program you are interested in uses Spyware. <http://www.spychecker.com>

SpyCop searches your computer for Spyware and alerts you to its presence. Available only for computers that run Microsoft Windows. <http://www.spycop.com>

Xcleaner detects and removes Spyware and performs other functions. <http://www.xblock.com>