

Spyware: protecting yourself from the Cyber Peeping Tom

In April 2005, a company called Direct Revenue released a spyware program called Aurora that sent so many pop up ads that it paralyzed thousands of computers. 43% of Internet users have been hit with spyware. A typical unprotected PC will come under attack within 20 minutes of being connected to the internet.

What is spyware?

Spyware is software acquired from the internet installed onto computers without the user's full knowledge or permission. Usually this software is also unwanted. Some spyware can be annoying but harmless, such as **adware**, which displays ads based on the user's browsing habits. In theory, adware is about old fashioned advertising: free software in exchange for displaying ads.

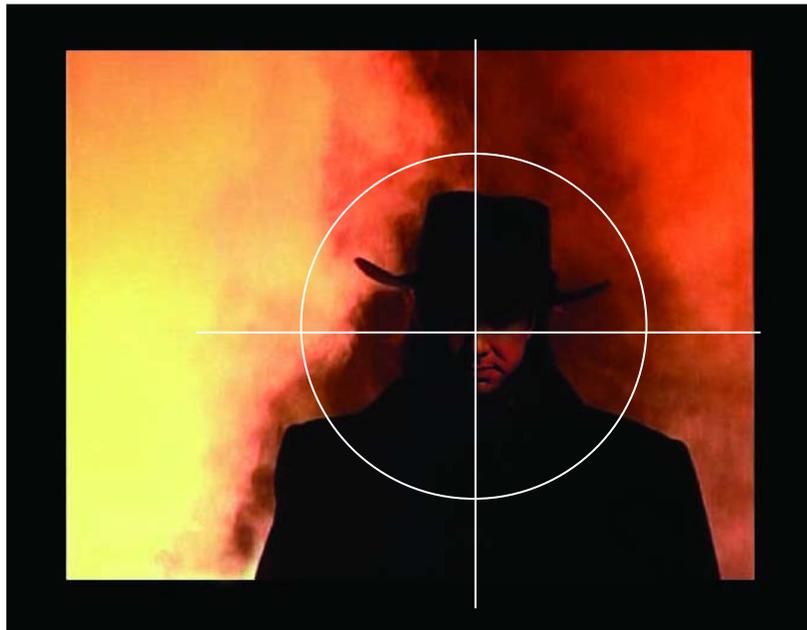
However, in reality, adware has become more about deceptive practices that alienate consumers.

Malware is a form of spyware that is not as

innocuous. This type demonstrates illegal, viral, fraudulent, or malicious behavior.

What's the danger?

Spyware comes to your computer in the form of free software, free music downloads, and from file sharing networks. Although rare, it can also come in an e-mail attachment. Often, when you are presented with a policy or



disclaimer to either enter an area or download free software, you inadvertently agree to spyware downloads. Online gaming sites

What's the solution?

It's not enough to have an anti-virus program to make up the gap where your operating system fails.

Malware is a form of spyware that is not as innocuous. This type demonstrates illegal, viral, fraudulent, or malicious behavior.

and adult areas are particularly subject to spyware.

Attacking software can execute code without the user clicking or opening anything. Some of the most recent malware is nearly impossible to remove. Spyware exploits faults in operating systems that inadvertently allow control to a program instead of the user. Microsoft's Windows OS are particularly vulnerable, although their upcoming version called *Vista* is addressing this huge security issue.

In May, a huge security flaw was discovered in Symantec's Anti-Virus Suite, the leading anti-computer virus software. It was addressed immediately, but this event signifies how spyware and malware is an ever-evolving problem.

It's also not enough to have a built-in firewall in your machine or broadband routers. Non-software firewalls can be turned off, configured incorrectly, and are also not the most current information fighting the newest



Jen Sharp
JenSharp.com

ways spyware circumvents security.

Disconnecting from the internet when not using it coupled with an anti-spyware program targeted specifically for eliminating spyware is the best solution. Free software is available online that is sufficient for protection, so there is no excuse! These companies would love to sell you an upgraded product, but their basic free versions are excellent. Here are three suggestions for both free and subscription based software:

- **ZoneAlarm** by Zone Labs www.zonelabs.com (free version and trials for other versions)
- **AVG Free Edition** by Grisoft www.grisoft.com (free software with no subscription fees, free updates)
- **Norton's Internet Security** by Symantec www.symantec.com (yearly subscription with updates)

Five Evaluation Criteria

From:

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/msft/analysis.msp>

Microsoft's researchers use the following categories to determine whether to add a program to the definition library for detection, what classification type, risk level and recommendation to give it.

- **Deceptive behaviors.** Runs processes or programs on the user's computer without notifying the user and getting the user's consent. Prevents users from controlling the actions taken by the program while it runs on the computer. Prevents users from uninstalling or removing the program.
- **Privacy.** Collects, uses, or communicates the user's personal information and behaviors (such as Web browsing habits) without explicit consent.
- **Security.** Attempts to circumvent or disable the security features on the user's computer, or otherwise compromises the computer's security.
- **Performance.** Undermines performance, reliability, and quality of the user's computing experience with slow computer speed, reduced productivity, or corruption of the operating system.
- **Industry and consumer opinion.** Considers the input from software industry and individual users as a key factor to help identify new behaviors and programs that might present risks to the user's computing experience.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project

Study July 2005, from random telephone-based interviews with 2,001 adult Americans; sampling error +/- 2%

- **43%** of internet users have been affected adversely by spyware, adware or both
- **91%** have made some sort of behavioral change
- **48%** stopped visiting specific sites they fear harboring spyware
- **25%** stopped using file-sharing software
- **18%** switched from Microsoft's Internet Explorer to Mozilla Firefox
- **81%** have been more cautious about e-mail attachments
- **20%** of cases where fixes were attempted on an infected machine, the problem could NOT be fixed

INFINITEC INC.

800-832-8246
www.infinitec.net

Municipal Software

- ✓ **Complete Accounting Package for Cities**
 - Budgetary Accounting
 - Utility Billing
 - Cemetery
 - Payroll
 - Court Reporting
 - Service Orders
- ✓ **On-Site Training & Assistance**
- ✓ **Full Service Computer Company**
 - Certified Computer Personnel/Networking
 - Municipal Web Module

Your Total Technology Solution