



COMPUTER TROUBLESHOOTERS

Global NEWS

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Spyware: What, Where, When, How and Why

There is a good chance you have heard of the terms “spyware”, “adware”, “malware” or other similarities, but do you know what this actually is and what it does? The best way to protect yourself from something is to know what it is, and where it comes from!

What? Spyware is a category of malicious software that uses a part of your computer without your knowledge, and without your permission. Typically, this is to send information about what you do (whether it is what keys you type or what you go and see) to online companies. Spyware is not a virus. It is not put there to destroy your computer, simply to use it to gain information. Spyware is sometimes illegal, and often against privacy laws.

Where? Spyware either comes from the internet or from a freeware program you (generally) have downloaded. Be wary of toolbars or search assistants for your web browsers, as the majority of these contain spyware. Pop-ups and some websites also create spyware ‘cookies’ on your PC. But, the easiest way to get spyware on your PC is to install it. Many free programs contain 3rd party software which is most often spyware (Kazaa, for example) and seems hidden from view until the effects kick in.

When? Spyware can hit you anytime you are surfing the net or when you are installing a downloaded program. Spyware must utilise the internet to send its information out, so the only way to be truly safe is to not have an internet connection, but these days an internet connection is considered essential. In saying this though, there are ways to reduce spyware threats so that you are protected.

How? Spyware affects you in different ways.



Spyware uses your internet connection and your computer to send information to others. Because it is doing this, you will find a substantial decrease in your PC’s performance, system crashes or hangs and sluggish internet. It is not uncommon to find a single PC infected with thousands of spyware programs, which leads to a significant drop in performance. Also, certain types of spyware will override your web browser’s homepage, or ‘hijack’ links to major websites, such as eBay. This makes you even more vulnerable, as every time you begin to surf the web, your PC is pumped with more spyware.

Why? Spyware was not created as a joke, an annoyance or as a destructive force, instead it was created to gain advertising companies a huge amount of money. It can result in the dispersing of spam to a lot of people from just monitoring one PC.

The way to get rid of spyware is to use anti-spyware programs such as Ad-Aware, Spybot, Spysweeper, MS AntiSpyware or many others. To be fully protected, you must also use a range of spyware scanners. Single spyware scanners don’t pick up everything, and using a range of scanners broadens the search spectrum therefore removing more unwanted spyware. Sometimes spyware attaches itself to system software and can be difficult to remove. Many people are turning to Mozilla Firefox as an alternative to Internet Explorer, as it is less targeted for spyware, and you get fewer intrusions.

If you want to totally avoid spyware don’t use the internet. But, for the best protection possible, contact your local Computer Troubleshooter.



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