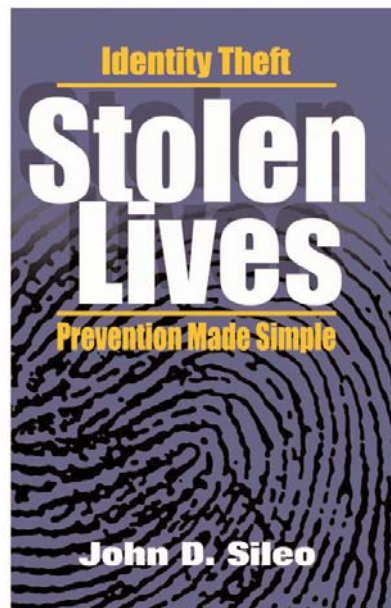


# **A Spyware Primer: Protecting Your Privacy and Profitability**

**A Companion Guide to:**



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## **A Spyware Primer: Protecting your Privacy & Profitability**

This is a short, two-page guide that could save you or your business thousands of dollars recovering from identity or data theft. Solving the problem does not have to be complex, but it does take action on your part.

If your computer is connected to the internet, you have been or will be infected by spyware. Taking early, rational steps to contain spyware will significantly lower costs associated with combating this new plague.

### **Definition of Spyware**

Spyware is any program that installs on your computer without your informed consent and most often adversely affects your computer's performance or forwards your personal information on to advertisers, competitors or hackers. Spyware comes in all flavors (adware, malware, etc.) – one of the more malicious forms records every keystroke you make and sends the data to those spying on you. This is one way that credit card numbers, customer records, buying habits, social security numbers and other vital statistics are hijacked from your system.

### **Symptoms of Spyware**

There are common computer symptoms that suggest your system has been infected by spyware: you receive popup ads; your computer or internet connection runs slower; your system or network crashes more often; the default home page changes without your consent; your wireless network won't connect; your computer "acts strangely."

### **How Spyware affects Profitability**

**Employee Productivity.** By introducing significant overhead to your systems and lowering the processing power of your computer and Internet connection (spyware uses your computing and connectivity power to transmit its information), spyware lowers the productivity of each employee with a computer. If your business has 10 systems on the internet and spyware slows productivity by just 10 minutes per day (approximately 2 reboots), you lose an average of 8.3 hours per week of work. Preventing this loss of productivity is a fraction of the cost of ignoring it.

**Computing Productivity.** If spyware slows down or corrupts your email server, web server or e-commerce site, it is directly impacting your potential clients, current customers, vendors and investors. For some businesses, servers only run at 75 percent processing capacity during peak buying times because of spyware. That is a 25 percent hit to profitability.

**Privacy Breaches.** Just ask yourself how much your customer list, credit card numbers, bank routing numbers, PIN numbers and passwords are worth. If you store any of these on a computer that ever connects to the internet, they are susceptible to spying. In some cases, you are legally bound to protect this information from outside eyes.

## The Myth of Spyware Prevention

To date, there is no such thing as spyware prevention. Don't be misled by emails or advertisements claiming to solve your spyware problems with a single program or technique (in fact, most of the emails install spyware on your system at unprecedented levels). Just as in the early days of viruses, spyware requires pro-active diligence, a combination of software techniques, good surfing habits and the technical expertise to remove the underlying "root" problems (e.g., the Windows registry) rather than just the symptomatic results (e.g., popup ads). Spyware evolves daily to avoid the detection and removal techniques of the previous day, making it a particularly difficult infection to cure.

## The Anti-Spyware Cocktail

Slowing down spyware requires a "multi-layered defense," -- or an Anti-Spyware Cocktail. Some of the ingredients are as follows:

1. As a first line of defense, download one of the free spyware removers such as Spybot or Ad-Aware. This will "sweep up" spyware and adware that has already made its way onto your system. Update and run this program weekly. As with anything free, however, it won't do the whole job on its own.
2. Have your IT provider install and configure a full spyware program like Pest Patrol with both preventative capabilities (blocking incoming spyware) and sweeping capabilities.
3. When your IT provider is installing the full spyware program, have them do a manual scan for embedded spyware. There are many programs that software won't detect but will be easily spotted by an experienced technician. If they are not fully and properly removed from Windows, they will re-propagate the next time you connect to the Internet.
4. Change your surfing habits. Don't open emails whose sender you don't recognize; never click on popup ads (especially the Decline button – always click the "X" in the upper right hand corner); stay away from peer-to-peer file sharing programs like Kazaa and Grokster.
5. Keep Windows up-to-date.

There is no easy, one-time solution to spyware. But following these steps and staying informed will drastically reduce damage to your computer(s), and consequently, to your profitability.

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