

Computer Bits by Mark Eggert of Raad One Network Solutions, Inc.

Welcome to Computer Bits, a series of articles on computers and network information. This is month's question is about a type of free software we all may have on our computers. **What is this Spyware I've been hearing about? Should I be leery of it?**

Let me start by defining Spyware, it is "Internet jargon" for Advertising Supported software or Adware. Adware provides a new way to make money from a software product, rather than selling it. If you have ever used a file sharing program like KaZaA, iMesh and Bearshare, or any download software like GoZilla, Download Minder, or BonziBuddy, then you have encountered Spyware. There are several large media companies that offer programmers money to place banner ads in their products. This way, you don't have to pay for the software, but the developers still get paid.

Spyware is not an illegal type of software. There are certain issues that a privacy oriented user may object to and therefore prefer not to use the product. This involves the tracking and sending of data and statistics of the user's PC and the use of your Internet connection in the background. While legitimate Adware companies will disclose the nature of data that is collected and transmitted in their privacy statement, there is almost no way for the user to actually control what data is being sent. The technology is capable of sending much more than just banner statistics, and this is why many people feel uncomfortable with the idea.

Spyware has two great uses. It allows free programming to exist. Programmers have an alternative to marketing their product. They can make a deal with an advertising company and the end user (you) can enjoy the product for free. Secondly it will allow you to have products marketed to your interests. If you are surfing the web looking for cars, you may notice that the banners you see suddenly switch to car ads. It is a much more effective way to match customers with products.

The downside of Spyware is that the software installs additional tracking software on your system, which uses your Internet connection and reports statistical data to the advertising server. While according to the privacy policies of the companies, there will be no sensitive or identifying data collected from your system and you shall remain anonymous, it still remains the fact, that you have a "live" server sitting on your PC that is sending information about you and your surfing habits to a remote location. This may cause you to experience a slower connection over a modem. Often these components of Spyware can interfere with the normal operation of your machine even after the Spyware is removed. Keep in mind that millions of people are using programs that support Spyware products and are not concerned about the privacy hype. In fact, some Spyware programs are among the most popular downloads on the Internet.

Whether Spyware is good or bad is up to you. If you choose that free programs are worth someone watching your Internet habits then feel free to download any free software. If you find the banners annoying, there is usually an option to remove them

(usually by paying for the registered program). If you need to remove Spyware, there are free programs to do that. Ad-aware is highly recommended to remove Spyware.

If you have a computer or network question you'd like answered and you think others would like to know the answer too, please forward them to me. My email address is meggert@wi.rr.com, my phone number is 262-679-7704 and my fax number is 262-679-7664.