Adware, Spyware, and Cookies FAQ

Adware & Spyware

Any software application in which advertising is displayed while the program is running is called Adware. Software that sends data back to a third party, without the user's knowledge, is Spyware. Software can be both Adware and Spyware but, not all adware is spyware and most spyware programs don't display ads.

Adware and spyware is deceptive software that takes over people's computers for the purpose of gathering their personal information or bombarding them with unwanted advertising. A recent survey by the National Cyber Security Alliance found that **90 percent of all personal computers could be infected with at least one form of spyware**

How do these programs get on your computer? Believe it or not, you invite most of them in when you install software downloaded from the Internet. For example, KaZaa file-sharing program comes bundled with at least three adware programs. Two of them serve ads directly to the desktop and a third redirects user's Internet browsers to a search engine full of ad-sponsored search results.

Keep current on all the critical Windows updates from Microsoft. Scan through licensing agreements before clicking OK. So-called "legitimate" adware is usually disclosed in the licensing agreement of the software you install.

Become accustomed to running anti-adware and anti-spyware programs to find and clean your computer of such applications. Free programs like AdAware or Spybot Search & Destroy can identify adware and spyware on your computer. Also, install a firewall software that monitors traffic leaving your computer. ZoneAlarm is one of many firewall softwares available as a free download.

How do I know if I'm on a secure site?
One way is to look at the web address; non-secure sites start with http:// a secure site will read https://
the 's' following the http indicates the site is secure. Or, look for the padlock in the lower left corner
of Netscape's window and the lower right corner of Internet Explorer's window. If the padlock is in
the locked position, the site is secure. If it's in the unlocked position (Netscape) or if there's no padlock
(Internet Explorer) the site is not secure.

Cookies: What are they?
A "cookie" is a unique piece of numeric data that can be deposited on your computer's hard drive as you
 visit web sites. Cookies help companies obtain and track information about web site visitors (i.e., frequency
of visits, length of visits, past purchase, preferences, etc.) For example: If you purchase software from an
Internet web site the company may keep track of what your software purchases have been and use that
information to recommend ideas for future purchases.
Over time, cookies can occupy considerable space on your hard drive. To delete the cookie files
 follow these steps:

Netscape - click **Edit** then **Preferences**. Double click **Advanced** under the category list. Click **Cache**
 then **Clear Disk Cache**. Click **OK** Twice. Open your email. Click **File**, then **Empty Trash On Local Mail**.

Internet Explorer - click **Tools** then **Internet Options**. Click **Delete Files** under Temporary Internet Files.
Click **OK** twice. Open your email, click **Edit** then **Empty Deleted Items folder**. If you don't find this
under Edit, look under **Tools**.

Question
How did I get spyware on my computer?
Answer
1. Some websites can exploit flaws in your browser and install spyware; others bring pop-ups that can
contain spyware.
2. Free software (often called Freeware or Shareware) often contains Adware or Spyware; read the
disclaimers during installation.
3. Some Commercial Software may even include Adware or Spyware; it may or may not be listed in the
disclaimer or license agreement.

Question
What are the noticeable effects of spyware?
Answer
1. Your homepage changes to something you did not set it to and may not let you change it back.
2. It may install new toolbars in Internet Explorer.
3. Pop-up advertising may take over your computer.
4. It may cause strange problems within Windows (slowness both with the computer itself and with the
Internet, strange errors, program problems, etc.).
5. It may block ports on your Internet connection causing some Internet applications (browser or email
applications typically) to stop functioning normally.

Question
How do I remove spyware from my computer?
Answer
There are several programs available on the internet that can assist with the removal of most spyware programs. The
three listed below are the most popular.
1. Ad-aware (available at http://www.lavasoft.de)
2. Spybot (available at http://www.safer-networking.org)
3. Microsoft Defender (currently in it's second beta, but available at
http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx)

Question
Where can I get more information on Spyware?
Answer
The following links are to sites with more detailed information about spyware as well as ways to diagnose
and avoid spyware-related issues:
http://www.cexx.org/adware.htm
http://www.safer-networking.org
http://www.lavasoft.de

Question
What is Spyware?
Answer
Spyware can be any software that does the following:

1. Installs itself on your computer without your knowledge and/or consent.
2. Collects/transmits information about your computer use or other habits without your knowledge and/or consent.
3. Keeps reinstalling itself, no matter how many times you remove it.

Sends you unwanted advertisements in the form of pop-ups on your computer whether you are online browsing or not.

Question What are cookies and how are they used? Answer: A "cookie" is a file placed on your hard drive by a Web site you visit. The original intent is for
cookies to contain information about your preferences, so the Web site can tailor its
appearance according to your needs. This saves time when you visit the site the next
time.

The security risk with cookies is that, since they are written directly to the hard drive,
they can store something dangerous (like a virus) or private (passwords). There is
also concern that one Web site can view a cookie created by another Web site. It appears
that cookies cannot be used to get other data from a user's hard drive (e.g.,
applications, database, address book, personal files, etc.). Cookies can also be
used to track where a user has been within a Web site.

 It is recommended that you do not accept cookies unless you have a reason for
doing so.