

# SPYWARE ON MY COMPUTER

Operating system cleanups here at the shop are costing 30 to 60 dollars these days. A big part of that is the spyware cleanup. The worst thing about spyware silently cohabitating on your computer isn't just how long it's been there or what it's been up to, but figuring out how the program landed on your computer in the first place. Where does this stuff come from?

Just like burrs clinging to your socks as you stroll through the woods, spyware attaches itself to your computer like a hitchhiking stowaway when you casually surf online. But before something can be installed on your computer you usually have to click on or open some object or program. Below are a few of the most common methods used to trick you into installing spyware:

- Opening spam email, delete these as needed.
- Clicking on deceptive popups, try not to click on them at all.
- Downloading "free" utilities, games, toolbars, media players, etc. Nothing's free in this world.
- File sharing programs. Again there is no such thing as "free".
- Visiting malignant websites, like warez, serialz, or bit torrent sites. (Usually to try and get something for free)
- Mainstream software applications and even brand name PCs come bundled with spyware. This can be to monitor usage habits, or to prevent piracy, but frequently there is an advertising kickback that lowers the cost of the system in the first place. Dell and HP actually get paid to put advertising shortcuts on the desktops of their computers; this is why they can sell them so cheaply.
- My personal favourite, bundled spyware with pirate downloads. You download stolen software (to avoid paying for it) and run it to find that it installs a pile of spyware, along with the stolen software.

There are plenty of safe websites, these will have a real product for sale that they make money from and the website itself is the advertising for the product. Mattel, VeggieTales and Lego all have excellent websites that advertise their products in an entertaining fashion but are free of spyware. On the other hand LyricsCafe and Guitartabs run entirely on advertising revenue. Pogo runs on advertising revenue and monthly memberships, which are supposed to be ad-free. Most of the poker sites do not install spyware at the site any longer; they are finding that business does better if they just let you play for free. The idea is that if they let you play for free, sooner or later you will be stupid enough to drop cash on the table. Unfortunately, they do use a pile of spyware on other sites to get you to the poker site.

If you are playing games for free, ask yourself how that can be, how can the website make money to pay for its existence?

If you have question or comments, I can always be reached via email [sean@intrex.ca](mailto:sean@intrex.ca) or join our forums at <http://intrex.ca> for more in-depth conversations.