

Is Spyware Slowing Your Computer Down To A Crawl?

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Everyday more and more computers are becoming infected with Spyware and Adware (advertising tracking). No matter where you go on the web, someone is trying to sneak something on your computer. From honest web sites placing simple logon cookies, to paid advertising tracking your movements on the web, to malicious software that is designed to record your keystrokes and discover your passwords, Spyware and Adware have together become the web's number one problem.

Many of these programs are downright dangerous and seriously threaten your online privacy and identity. But even the simple and supposedly benign Adware programs can cause you serious problems.

Spyware is any program that installs itself onto your computer with the intent to spy on your activity. This can be recording your online searching habits, or whatever you type on your keyboard. Adware is not much better. It is designed to watch what you do online, where you go, which terms you search for and then report this to the ad agency that runs the adware program.

Adware programs may be designed with the best intentions in mind, but even these can cause your computer serious problems.

Here is what happens. Many, if not most, advertisers on the internet will try and place a cookie or other small program on your computer. Many will add code that will track that cookie as it hits different pages. The code may be designed simply to gather anonymous data, or it may be trying to send ads to your browser that the advertising company thinks you will be more likely to respond to.

Whatever the case, the Adware or Spyware is using your computer to do its tracking. This means that part of your computer's power and CPU cycles are being diverted away from the activity you are trying to perform. Your computer is being used by someone else instead to track your movements. Now, when we multiply this behavior by tens or hundreds of Adware or Spyware programs all trying to use your computer for their work you can begin to see the problem.

These programs can literally slow your computer down to a crawl, or make it crash altogether. They can fill your computer up with trash files, open unwanted popup windows, use up the space in your internet cache and generally just make working on your computer a nightmare.

Luckily there are several easy solutions to the problem. But first let me make one distinction, Spyware and Adware are not the same thing as a computer virus. Although a computer virus can install spyware on a computer, you will need different tools to remove a computer virus and to keep your system clean from Spyware and Adware. You should be using both a high quality commercial anti-virus program and one or more good quality programs for handling the spyware/adware problem.

There are several good Spyware/adware programs on the market. I use two different programs on my network, Ad-aware from Lavasoft and Spy Sweeper from Webroot Software although there are several others. You can easily find both of these by doing an internet search for Ad-aware and Spy Sweeper. Or simply do a search for spyware. Both of these programs will scan your hard drives and registry and present you with a list of spyware/adware programs hiding on your system. You can then quarantine or remove the offending programs. I use both of these programs since neither one seems to catch everything. Plus I will run them 2 or more times in a row, the nastier spyware will not be completely removed on the first pass.

The process is very easy and I recommend running these programs at least once a week and every time you have been doing some extended web surfing. You will be surprised at how many of these spyware/adware programs will sneak onto your system. I run a very clean network and I have yet to scan my system and not come up with at least a few of these hiding on my hard drive.

So be aware of the problem, take reasonable precautions, scan your system frequently, and the spyware/adware curse can be broken.

Author: kavita

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