



## Why Spyware is Dangerous, Even if you have Nothing to Hide

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If you are a casual computer user, you may be wondering, "What's the big deal about spyware? I have nothing to hide." This is a dangerous assumption because you may have more to hide than you think. Sure, you may primarily use the computer to correspond with friends, swap recipes, or play games online, but it is not the e-mail messages or recipes that hackers are interested in. They want your Social Insurance Number, credit card numbers, and shopping preferences. They want your account numbers, user names, and passwords. They want to take over your computer and harvest this same information from other vulnerable computers. This list is endless.

Even if you do not use your computer for managing your finances, hackers may be tracking your online activities. Who cares if you visit websites dedicated to quilting, knitting, crocheting, and sewing, right? Advertisers care! If spyware makes its way onto your computer, it may start serving up tons of popup ads for quilt batting, knitting needles, fabric, and yarn. These targeted ads are based on your Internet habits that have been monitored by spyware. Worse yet, you may get untargeted ads – graphic ads for pornography websites!

If you use financial tools such as online banking or money management software, your identity is at risk. Keystroke loggers can secretly record every keystroke you make and send these logs to third party hackers who will harvest your account numbers and log on credentials!

Hackers also like hacking into popular e-mail accounts such as MSN. Once they have your user name and password, they then pose as you and send embarrassing messages to all of your contacts.

Another spyware danger involves botnets. Hackers use malicious software to turn vulnerable computers into "robots" or "zombies." Once robotized, your computer is at the mercy of hackers who instruct it to carry out malicious attacks. It may not be stealing your personal information but it could be stealing data from other computers or acting as an agent of destruction.



If unwanted ads, identity theft, embarrassment, and unwittingly acting as a criminal's robot aren't bad enough, spyware on your computer can adversely affect its performance. Each unwanted spyware program takes up valuable computer resources such as memory, CPU power, and Internet bandwidth. You spent a lot of money on your computer and spyware can quickly render it nearly inoperable. Spend a little each year on reliable antivirus and antispyware tools and keep your identity safe and computer running as it should.