



Quick definitions

Spyware:

Any technology that aids in gathering information about a person or organization without their knowledge

Adware:

Any software application in which advertising banners are displayed while the program is running.

Spyware: What is it?

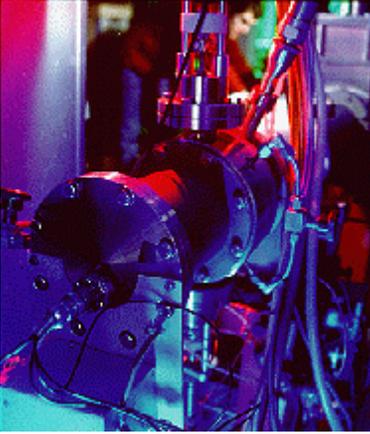
Spyware is a program installed on your computer that keeps track of your web surfing and sends the information back to the owner. It isn't illegal, but it will compromise your privacy online (by sending pop-up ads geared towards you) and will bog down your Internet connection (by using it, partially, to send and retrieve information about you from your computer).

Spyware is generally downloaded either by accident (visiting Fortune City's pages: <http://members.fortunecity.com/lankapage/> will prompt you for the Xupiter download) or as part of a bundled software program (Kazaa's file-sharing program includes Bonzai Buddy). This is one way companies have of making money on the Internet.

If you've noticed strange icons on your desktop, or if browser windows pop open when visiting sites that don't usually have pop-up ads (e.g. <http://www.google.com>), you may have a spyware program installed on your computer. Don't worry – removing it from your computer will be (hopefully) quick and painless.

Common Spyware Programs

1. <http://www.tom-cat.com/spybase/index.html>
Bonzai Buddy - Users report it sends out a flurry of messages to a server, and virus scanners are detecting the presence of dlder.exe and explorer/explorer.exe as backdoor trojans.
2. <http://www.doxdesk.com/parasite/CometCursor.html>
Comet Cursor changes the mouse pointer when hovering over partner sites. It is infamous for being one of the first programs to stealth-install, and for tracking viewing habits.
3. <http://www.doxdesk.com/parasite/HotBar.html>
Hotbar - Marketed as a program to add graphical skins to IE toolbars, it also adds its own toolbar. It monitors all URLs you visit to add link buttons to its toolbar dependent on the site.
4. <http://www.doxdesk.com/parasite/Xupiter.html>
Xupiter consists of an Internet Explorer toolbar containing link buttons to one of Xupiter's search engines and a task run at Windows startup which downloads updates to the software and may launch pop-ups. It also contains functionality to hijack your home page and address bar searches, and add Xupiter links to your bookmarks.



What is a cookie?

A cookie is a bit of information about you that another computer stores on your computer (it may keep track of passwords or user preferences). Amazon.com uses this to track your book interests; The New York Times online uses this to save your password.

To change your cookie settings in Internet Explorer, choose "Tools→Internet Options→Security→Custom Level" and scroll down to "Cookies" (PC users: cookies are stored at C:\Windows\Cookies). To change your cookie settings in Netscape, choose "Edit→Preferences →Advanced→Cookies".

CONTACT US

The System Department of the New York Society Library selects, upgrades, and maintains computer resources for the Library staff and patrons. If you have a question or problem with any Library-related computer resource, please contact us.

Spyware: Detection & Removal

1. Go to LavaSoft's website and download AdAware (it's free): <http://www.lavasoftusa.com/support/download/> Install and run it on your computer. AdAware will detect and remove all occurrences of Spyware that it finds (including third-party cookies that send information back to the advertiser). It will look at your files, folders and registry settings, and give you prompts to remove the settings.
2. If that fails, visit the main site of the offending page (for Hotbar, visit: <http://www.hotbar.com> ; for Xupiter, visit: <http://www.xupiter.com>) Look on the page for a very small link to how to remove their product from your computer. Remember that it's in their best interest if you don't remove their spyware, so they'll make it difficult for you to find. On Xupiter.com, it's under "FAQ", then under "How do I uninstall one of your software products?" This will take you to a new page, which will prompt you to run the Xupiter uninstaller.
3. If that fails, enter the search terms into Google (i.e. uninstall Comet Cursor). Find a reputable page and follow the instructions for removal.
4. Be cautious of pop-up programs prompting you to download programs. Certain ones are legitimate (Macromedia's Flash, DirectX, QuickTime, and Language fonts for viewing pages); others are not so legitimate (temperature readings in system tray; optimizing Internet connection; quick-search toolbars built into the browser; rotating desktop backgrounds and screensavers).
5. Question why the company is offering you this free software – it usually isn't out of altruism. As an example, the Google add-on toolbar that gives you website ratings is also keeping track of your surfing habits in order to create the ratings. Of course, you're completely free to download whatever you want on the Internet, including spyware, but proceed with caution.

Further resources

LavaSoft's AdAware – free tool for detecting and removing Spyware:
<http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>

Spychecker – for descriptions & removal:
<http://www.spychecker.com/spyware.html>

Spyware Info, for definitions and a bulletin board:
<http://www.spywareinfo.com/>