

From: Tim McAdams
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Posted To: spywareworkshop2004
Conversation: Spyware Workshop - Comment, P044509
Subject: Spyware Workshop - Comment, P044509

Dear Sir,

Any program running on my machine without my permission is stealing from me. It's stealing computer resources, and probably more importantly my time. In the best case it is as aggravating as unsolicited phone calls. Often it interferes with efficient use of the machine. It also restricts what information I put on the machine because I can't have confidence that some spyware program won't maliciously send the information to others. I've spent many hours trying to fix friends' machines that have basically become unusable because of interfering spyware programs. Usually there is nothing to do but delete everything on the hard drive by reformatting it, and then reinstalling the operating system and applications. Much time is wasted for all parties involved. Computers and the internet are becoming a more valuable part of everyone's lives. We're doing more important things online, like taking courses, paying bills, buying stock, checking medical records, etc. We need protection from this type of unsolicited interference.

Some say it's not unsolicited, because the user may have clicked "OK" to some type of "agreement" where this permission for spyware may have been buried in the fine print. If the primary purpose of the agreement was not for installation of spyware then it's dishonest.

I applaud the telephone "do not call" list. It's been extremely effective in my case. We need something as effective in restricting spyware. If user permission to install software is already required, let's make it more explicit. Require that a standard message be displayed requesting explicit permission to install the spyware. And clearly identify it as spyware. If a standard method is defined for the request, browsers can be set up to block that type of request so that inadvertant permission is not given. It might be similar to methods that browser software use to "block cookies" today. Plus, if it does inadvertently get installed, it should show up in the list of installed software as "spyware", so that it can be easily uninstalled. And if a spyware program doesn't follow the requirements, make it liable for the effect it has on the user. Something needs to be done now.

Thanks,
Tim McAdams