

Windows

# ADWARE, SPYWARE & SCUMWARE

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The terms *adware*, *spyware* and *scumware* are frequently used, but, seldom understood. Based upon multiple sources, this article describes the differences between them.

*Adware* is any software that secretly gathers personal info through the Internet and relays it back to another computer, usually for advertising, which serves banner ads or pop-up ads to you while in use. This is done by tracking your files, Web usage, & software and reporting it back to advertisers to help them channel relevant ads to you.

Many Websites have legitimate advertising that is not adware. Adware displays advertising banners while the program runs, which are viewed through pop-up windows, banners or display bars.

Adware is used to recover development costs. It is downloaded from sites (typically in shareware or freeware), email, and instant messengers. A user may unknowingly trigger adware

by accepting an “End User License Agreement” from software linked to the adware.

Adware is malicious when it includes code that tracks a user’s personal information, and distributes it to third parties, without the user’s authorization or knowledge.

According to *PC Therapy*, these are some of the adware producers:

- 123Messenger
- 123Search
- 202Search
- A Better Internet
- ACXInstall
- AdBreak
- AdGoblin
- Adult Chat Dialer
- Adult-Links
- Aomum
- AproposMedia
- Asпам
- Aureate
- BargainBuddy
- BDE
- BonziBuddy
- BookedSpace
- BrowserAid
- Browser ToolBar

- Bulla
- Clearsearch
- Clear Stream Accelerator
- Click Till U Win
- Click The Button
- CrisMin

*Spyware* is software planted on your system to capture and reveal information to someone outside your system. It can do such things as capture your keystrokes while typing passwords, read and track your e-mail, record what sites you visit, pass along credit card numbers and so on. It can be planted by Trojan horses or viruses, installed as part of freeware or shareware programs you download and run, installed by an employer to track your computer usage, or even planted by advertising agencies to assist in feeding you targeted ads.

It is a category of software that tracks user behavior without a user's knowledge. Spyware can find its way onto a user's computer in a variety of ways. It may, for instance, manifest itself as part of a virus or Trojan horse. Recently, however, spyware is increasingly finding its way onto the user's computer systems

through legitimate software and applications. Companies may, for instance, install spyware on a user's computer to track browsing habits and relay the info to advertisers. Companies such as DoubleClick, FlowGo, and RealNetworks have come under fire in spyware-related incidents.

According to *Network World* ("Critics Decry Spread of 'Scumware' on the Web," 19 Aug 2002, pp. 1, 61), "In general terms, scumware is software that surreptitiously changes the appearance of Webpages. It does so without the permission of Web Masters or Website content owners — an act scumware makers justify by saying their software does not alter HTML programming code used to build Websites. Rather, it affects what a visitor who has installed a scumware program sees on his Desktop while surfing the Web." In other words, if you have a program like Gator, you will see "Searching for a Loan?" ad when you visit *The New York Times*.

Commercial firms creating new ways to weasel one's email account. A wrinkle is flowgo.-

com's "Chain of Remembrance" which appears to be a tribute to the fallen heroes of 9/11. However, if you add your name and email address, you will be added to its automatic spam sender.

Flowgo also offers free e-cards you can send to your friends. However, the minute they click on the link to read that card — unless they read the small print at the bottom and opt out — they are added to Flowgo's spam mailings.

Blatant offenders include eZula, Gator, Surf+.



Brian Livingston (Adware Makers Threaten Critics, *Info-World*, March 7, 2005) said, "It's bad enough that adware, which can have negative effects on our PC's, has already infected an astonishing number of machines — 80% in one U.S. study. Now, on top of everything else, adware makers are pressuring anti-adware advocates to stop listing their programs as candidates for removal.

"In the newest development, iDownload.com has sent cease-and-desist letters to several anti-adware sites. Some of the Webmasters I've spoken with say they received the letters on Feb. 15 or 16. Sites that have confirmed to me that they've received the letters include Castle Cops, Spyware Warrior, Spyware Guide, and Sunbelt Software, the maker of the CounterSpy adware removal program."