



Your Trusted Technology Adviser

What's the difference between a Virus, Spyware, Adware and Malware?

Do you ever get the feeling that you are being watched ? When you sit down to surf the net do you somehow sense that computer is taking note of the sites you visit, that it keeps track of what you are doing online ? I don't want to alarm you but it could very well be happening. Especially if you start seeing a lot of pop-up ads all of a sudden. There is a certain kind of software out there, written by nefarious individuals, known as spyware.

Just by thinking about the name 'spyware' you can probably get an idea of what it does. Sometimes also known as adware (though not necessarily the same thing), these software programs keep an eye on what happens on a computer, most often what sites are visited on the web. Based on the results of their spying, they can then start showing numerous pop-up ads, change your browser homepage or repeatedly keep taking you back to the same site in effect locking you out of where you want to go.

Is spyware/adware a virus?

Not really. I mean, it doesn't usually meet all the requirements to be called a virus. For example, this sort of software doesn't try to spread or replicate itself and usually doesn't want to really harm your computer. Mostly, these programs want to sell you something, like a program to rid yourself of annoying pop-ups (their pop-ups of course) or make you visit some advertiser's website. Further, very often spyware and adware programs are installed by users themselves. They sometimes 'piggyback' on other, free, software, meaning that when you install some free software that you downloaded you may see a screen that says something about it automatically installing other software that will 'Help support the software to keep it free' or to 'More personalise your web experience' or something along those lines. Well, the other software that is being installed could very well be, and most likely is, spyware/adware.

Don't get panicked every time you see a pop-up ad. Many sites allow advertisers to show pop-ups when you visit. So seeing one or two ads occasionally isn't anything to be concerned about. However, if you can't even login to the internet without a bunch of ads popping up in your face then you may want to consider some removal software. Many anti-virus programs will now also scan for adware/spyware. If you are concerned, just check the anti-virus program you are using. For business usage we recommend SOPHOS see www.sophos.com . You can also check out the free, dedicated anti-malware programs: Ad-Aware at www.lavasoft.com or Malwarebytes at www.malwarebytes.org

Don't let the threat of adware and spyware push you to exasperation. Call Garry MacDonald at Tartan IS on tel. 9094 5542 or email garry.macdonald@tartanis.co.uk for a free computer network security analysis.