



Recruitment firms must tackle Spyware

Mark Alderton, mark@kobinetworks.com

Recruitment firms both large and small must tackle without delay the problem of Spyware and adware. It is claimed that nearly two thirds of all PCs are infected with spyware. Quite a scary thought! But don't go throwing your systems out of the window just yet, there is help at hand and the good news is it's free of charge.

The first place we should begin is by defining what Spyware and Adware is. And then, more importantly, how we can detect and remove them from your PCs.

Spyware

Spyware, also referred to as adware, malware, trackware, scumware, thiefware, snoopware, sneakware is software that gathers information about how you use your computer and then transmits this information to a server. The information gathered may include the websites you have visited, the applications you are using or the specifications of your PC. Nothing too sinister in this but it is an annoyance as your PC slows down, gets bombarded with pop-up adverts every time you connect to the Internet and your web browser gets hijacked with those infuriating toolbars. The sinister side of Spyware is the "invisible" threat, such as keyloggers and backdoor Trojans. These are programs that can bypass your security and firewall and steal your confidential information, like user names and passwords. To give an idea of the scale of the problem a recent survey conducted by Gartner technology analysts revealed that US consumers lost \$1.2bn to online fraud.

Adware

Adware is software that may have been installed on your computer by a remote site... unbeknown to you! Many free utilities that you download from the Internet will install hidden software that sends details of the websites you visit and other information from your computer (which can include your email address) to advertisers so they can target you with popup ads and spam. Whilst not necessarily malicious, adware is considered to go beyond reasonable advertising that one might expect from freeware. However, adware ceases to be harmless when it starts silently spying on you and changes from being adware into spyware.

As a general rule of thumb you know you have been infected with spyware when you start to see:

- sluggish PC performance
- increased pop-up ads
- unexplained homepage change
- Mysterious search results.

Solution

To cleanse your PCs of this malicious software is a relatively easy task. For the recruitment companies that do not have a Network Server you can download and use free of charge any one of the many programs that remove spyware and adware. The most effective of these programs are Ad-Aware, Spybot Search and Destroy and Spyware Blaster. You can download the programs from the following addresses: www.lavasoft.com, www.safer-networking.org and www.javacoolsoftware.com. For those with a server there is an enterprise version available from Norman that will pro-actively monitor the network and prevent your network from becoming infected. When I spoke to Norman today they said the product will be available by the end of the month. If you would like to evaluate their offering drop me a quick email and I will arrange for Norman to send you a copy. mark@kobinetworks.com

Once you have cleansed your system of the malicious spyware there are a few good housekeeping rules that you can put in place that will help prevent further infections:

1. Make sure your antivirus software is up to date. This will detect any backdoor Trojans on your system.
2. Make sure you have a firewall in place. For PCs that are not connected to a server you can use the firewall that comes as part of Windows XP. If you need help in enabling this, just drop me a line at mark@kobinetworks.com.
3. Ensure that you have the latest security updates for your operating system, browser and email package. For Windows users you can set this up to happen automatically, giving you more time to concentrate on your recruitment business..
4. For those without a server, periodically run the Spyware and Adware programs you are using.

If you do nothing else this month, get rid of the spyware from your system. This is not just another buzzword devised to scare the pants off you; it can be a real threat to your recruiting business.

All the best,

Mark