Speeding Up That Slow-Running Computer

by **BILL PERRY**

Your computer was lightning fast when you first bought and installed it. What happened? The slow running computer is one problem plaguing most users today, and the solution is sometimes difficult to achieve.

One of the culprits, "Spyware," has been deployed via e-mails, web sites, free programs, free screensavers and other methods. There is a really "cute" application that delivers the weather and temperature in your area of the country. It comes with a long and difficult to read license agreement. One of the current paragraphs in this agreement reads:

Advertising: "The Software is provided for your use, as described above, free of charge, and is supported by advertising revenue. Separate, 'ad-free' versions of the Software are available to all users subscribing to the 'software upgrade.'"

We all allow these neat free pieces of software to be installed on our computers, but what might

this "Advertising" paragraph mean? It is not clear, but I propose it means you are giving your permission for marketing software to be loaded on your computer. It is very general in scope and allows them to do just about any marketing information retrieval on your computer because you have granted them permission to do so.

Get enough of these "adware" programs running on your computer and it ends up working harder for them than it is working for you.

So the old saying "There's no such thing as a free lunch," rings true here. Oh, and when you might uninstall the main program, the "adware" programs that came with it remain.

Spyware

Spyware is not well defined and each anti-spyware program seems to have differing opinions on what comprises spyware. We will discuss three free versions

that we like and have used extensively and a couple that are paid-for. It turns out the free ones do not seem to bring additional problems to your computer. That's a real bonus!

• **Adaware SE Personal** — This program is currently available free from www.lavasoftusa.com. When you run it, you need to update it to the latest definitions it has available for spyware and then you need to scan your computer to identify and remove the spyware. We recommend doing a "full-system scan" every time as that forces the program to look in all the places that could contain spyware on your computer. During this process the program will locate all the spyware it knows

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about and allow you to remove it. Sometimes, in order to remove the spyware, the program must finish its job after rebooting your computer.

• **Spybot — Search and Destroy** — This free program is located at www.download.com. Just put Spybot in the search box at this site and it will make the program-download link available to you. When you install it, you will be led through backing up your registry and then updating its spyware definitions. The definitions that Spybot knows about and the ones from Adaware SE are different, so you have to run the updates for both programs to be sure you are checking for the latest spyware that Spybot knows about. After updating you also need to "immunize" your system, which is one of the options available to you from the program. After installing, update and immunizing, then you need to search and destroy. As above, during this process the program will locate all the spyware it knows about and allow you to remove it. And, sometimes in order to remove the spyware, the program must finish its job after rebooting your computer.

• **Microsoft Antispyware** (still in beta release) — This program is available from www.microsoft.com. Just put Antispyware in the search box at the top of this site and it will make the program information and download link available to you. This is a new offering from Microsoft that is quite good. It has the ability to automatically update itself and automatically run on a schedule you determine. It also has its own spyware definitions that do not exactly match the other two above. Setting it to run at 2 a.m. and then leaving your computer powered on is a good way for it to do its job and not interfere with your daily computer usage.

• **Additional Versions** — Finally, there are two paid versions of spyware removal programs that we like. One is from Stomp, Inc., called Spyware Xterminator (http://stompsoft.com/) and the other is from Webroot Software, Inc., (http://www.webroot.com/) called Spy Sweeper. Both of these are excellent and follow the "update-first-then-run" process defined above. Each has nuances that you might find you like and their pricing is reasonable. Currently they are $30 each, which includes the program and one year of updated spyware definitions. You might also find them for less on sales or with rebates at your local computer store.

We run the first three above on every computer we maintain, every week. And we find new infestations of spyware every week. What a pain and seemingly a waste of time, but dealing with a slow computer is also a waste of time. ❏

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