

Hijackware

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Internet Tips And Secrets <http://www.internet-tips.net>

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ethical: conforming to accepted professional standards of conduct -- Merriam-Webster OnLine: Collegiate Dictionary.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary.htm> 2001.

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I swear, internet marketing companies are getting more obnoxious and unethical every day. I guess it was just naive to think the banner ad risen to it's highest heights of stupidity with the "punch the money" banner. And I don't know about you, but I didn't really believe the marketers could get any lower on the scum scale than the exit windows that run away from the cursor so they are more difficult to close.

Well, I was wrong and I admit I was incredibly naive.

The marketers have come up with some incredibly unethical, horribly annoying gimmicks. The dirty tricks they are pulling now make exit windows look like child's play. In fact, the games these boys are playing makes the marketing methods of the scummiest adult web sites look downright professional in comparison.

The trend seems to have started a few years ago with a handy little utility called Gator. This "tool" professed to offer a great benefit to surfers - the ability to remember the contents of forms and password entry screens. Further, since Gator is actually pretty good at recognizing that a page contains a known form or password entry field, it is indeed very useful. I installed the program for a

while and found it to be a wonderful complement to my surfing.

True, it did have this annoying habit of throwing a "coupon" up on my screen occasionally. I didn't think much about it at all - I just closed the coupon as quick as I could. This phenomenon didn't happen very often - in fact, at first I had difficulty figuring out what was actually causing it to occur. I naturally assumed this was a feature of the web site that I was visiting.

However, the coupons slowly became more and more common, and they began appearing at the worst possible times. They interfered with my shopping and surfing habits by breaking my train of concentration and thought.

I began to try and understand this strange phenomenon. I quickly realized this was a byproduct of Gator - and I soon understood that the utility was simply "bait" to get people to install an insidious, almost evil, advertising machine on their systems. In fact, the program is so obnoxious and so unethical that I truly believe no sane person would install it, no matter what the benefit, if they completely understood what was going on.

Gator (and other similar, but less popular products) is something called a "Browser Helper Object". What this means is it is a small program which makes itself known to Internet Explorer, telling IE that to send information to Gator about the web pages that are being loaded into the browser. It's the job of a Browser Helper Object to extend the capabilities of the browser in a useful way. In the case of Gator, the usefulness is to recognize forms and password entry fields so default values can be inserted.

In addition, Gator wants to know what kinds of advertisements are appearing on the pages that are being loaded. It also wants to see if the page's subject is related to a product which one of its paid advertisers is hawking. This is its real purpose. The convenience is just a smoke screen.

Let's say you are surfing to your favorite shopping site and you want to order some flowers. You proceed to the flower shop and suddenly a "coupon" magically appears in front of you, offering you flowers elsewhere, presumably better or at a lower cost.

Okay, let's put this in real world terms so you can understand what's really going on. Let's pretend you are at the mall, going from shop to shop. There is this guy (let's call him Benedict) standing behind you with a notebook and pen in his hand. He has a bag of flyers hanging from one shoulder and a money counting machine on the other.

As you go from store to store Benedict watches your every move (by the way, he has a radio and reports everything you do back to his home office where it is permanently recorded). You go into a clothing store and pick up a pair of jeans. Suddenly a flyer appears under your nose, informing you there are cheaper, better jeans in a shop down the road. You look Benedict and he smiles nicely at you. You push the flyer out of the way and keep shopping.

Now you go into a candy store and walk up to the counter to order some chocolate. Again, a flyer appears in front of your face offering you chocolate at discount prices in a competing store. You push the flyer out of the way and pick out some chocolate that you want to purchase. Benedict pulls out his money counting machine, takes your wallet, counts the money, hands it to the cashier, and returns your wallet. This, by the way, is the "benefit" that makes it useful to have Benedict around.

I'll bet it wouldn't take long before you either called the cops or punched Benedict in the nose! And, of course, the store operators would make sure Benedict was arrested and thrown in jail, and they would sue the company for sure.

Well, guess what, it's gotten worse and more unethical, as hard as that is to believe.

According to reports, Gator is now working on a version which not only throws coupons in front of your face, it actually finds banners ads and covers them up with other advertisements so carefully and precisely that you would never know the original ad was there.

Now Benedict runs ahead of you as you shop and replaces all of the signs with advertisements for other stores. If you walked through our hypothetical mall and peaked under that ad for a movie, you might find there is actually an ad for an entirely different movie there. The billboard might actually be advertising something totally different. In fact, the signs in the stores themselves could be replaced with signs directing you to other stores.

Is this legal?

Well, Gator's terms and conditions do tell you they are going to do this. And you are supposed to read them (all gazillion pages) before you download the program. And of course, the terms and conditions are written in such a user friendly and simple way that you would certainly have no trouble completely understanding and agreeing to their tactics. (Sarcasm intentional).

I'm sure Gator would also argue that web sites do not own the user's desktops. And after all, the users did agree to the terms and conditions by installing Gator, so they must want this "service", right?

I must admit I am just as guilty as everyone else, when it comes to reading terms and conditions. I mean, I just downloaded the silly thing and installed it. I did what everyone else does - I clicked through the terms and conditions without a glance. For all I know, I could have signed away my soul.

This is a lesson we all have to learn - by clicking through the terms and conditions we AGREE to them. By installing a program, we AGREE to the terms and conditions. Since the ONLY WAY to install the program is to click through the screen containing the terms and conditions and clicking a button that says, "yes I read this and I understand that my soul now belongs to you and I am happy with it", well, the companies are covered. Oh yes, and your soul is toast.

Are programs such as this ethical?

No. Not by any definition of the word. This is unethical in terms that the adult web sites have not even come close to. Programs like Gator are produced by the lowest form of pond scum - scum which is so dirty and filthy that even normal scum does not want to be associated with it. In fact, if this pond scum enters a pond, all of the other scum will go to a different pond in a different country just so as not to sully their own names any more than they already have.

What should we do about it?

First, we all need to start reading terms and conditions. The web is based upon these poorly written, conniving and often one-sided documents. We must ALL begin to read them, understand them, and if we don't agree to them, then we must not install the program or use the service.

Second, do as I have done. If you have any Spyware (programs which report your information back to the home office) or Hijackware (programs like Gator), uninstall it immediately without any delay. Download Ad-Aware, run it and follow the directions. This will allow you to safely remove all of this junk from your system fast.

Third, if you find out that advertisers are using Hijackware, then refuse to purchase their products.

Be sure and send them an email to let them know why you are doing so. Be polite and direct.

Forth, if you like the Hijackware's functions but do not want to experience it's side effects, then look for an alternative. There are plenty of programs out there that can do what you want without being so unethical, obnoxious and downright, well, evil about it.

My final advice. Just say no. It's simple and it's easy. Don't use these kinds of programs and don't purchase from companies who use them. This is the only way that we will force this kind of scum out of business.

Additional Information

Ad Blocking

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/adbblocking.htm>

Banner ads are everywhere, and they take up valuable bandwidth. In addition, they are ugly and distracting. Here's how to remove them.

Browser Helper Objects

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Browsers/bho.htm>

Is your system crashing? Perhaps you've unknowingly done what I did - added a Browser Helper Object.

Products - Ad-Aware

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/adaware.htm>

Want to remove spyware from your system? Ad-Aware is a quick and simple product which will help you do that safely.

Products - AdSubtract Pro

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/adsubtract.htm>

You want to eliminate banner ads and web bugs? AdSubtract Pro does an excellent job.

Products - Cookie Pal

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/cookiepal.htm>

Need to manage cookies as you surf the internet? Then you will not find a better program than Cookie Pal.

Tanstaaf - Spyware

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Tanstaaf/spyware.htm>

Be careful installing ad supported products - you may find that you every move on the internet is being watched!

Tanstaaf - Spyware - Alexa

http://www.internet-tips.net/Tanstaaf/spyware_alex.htm

Alexa is one of the more flagrant spyware products. My advice is to avoid it like the plague.

Tanstaaf - Juno

http://www.internet-tips.net/Tanstaaf/tanstaaf_juno.htm

Juno wants to turn your computer into a module of it's own supercomputer. Do you really want to let them?

Web Bugs

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/webbugs.htm>

Web bugs are little graphic images inserted into web pages, emails and other web-aware documents to allow companies to gather information about you without your knowledge.

Web Bugs Are Crawling Everywhere

http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/webbugs_growing.htm

You've heard about web bugs. They are little things designed to track your movements. Watch out - they are exploding all over the internet.

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