

# STAR Watch

Statewide Technology Assistance Resources Project  
A publication of the Western New York Law Center, Inc.



Volume 5 Issue 3

July 2001

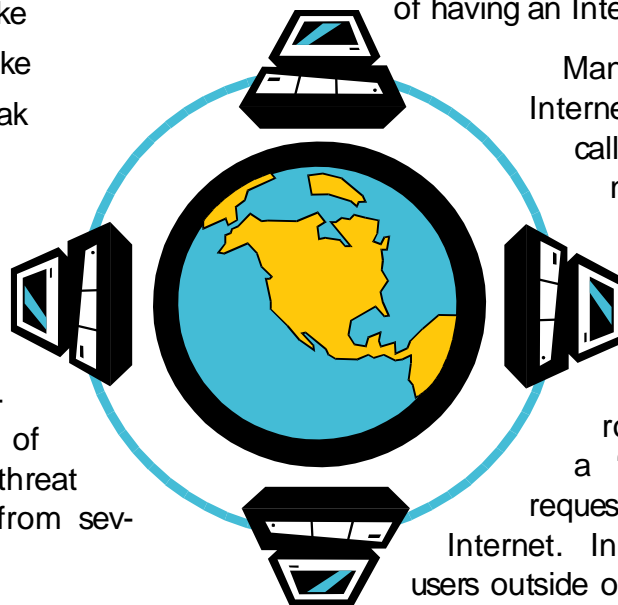
## The Internet and Privacy

Every breath you take  
Every move you make  
Every bond you break  
Every step you take  
I'll be watching you  
--The Police

Privacy is an increasing concern among users of the Internet. The threat to privacy comes from several sources.

According to a recent study by the American Management Association, a New York-based corporate training and consulting group, three-quarters of U.S. businesses now electronically monitor employees in some fashion and 63 percent monitored Internet connections. Although much of the monitoring is intentional (three-quarters of the companies disciplined people for inappropriate Internet use) some of the monitoring by businesses might be inadvertent and may just be part

of having an Internet connection.



Many offices connect to the Internet by placing a box, called a router, on their network. One end of the router connects to the network and the other end connects to a high-speed line. The router provides security - a "firewall" - by filtering requests that come from the Internet. In this way, other Internet users outside of the office are kept out of the internal network. As part of the filtering process, many routers keep track of all Internet activity on both sides of the

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router, effectively creating a record of all Internet requests going out or coming in.

Sophisticated routers with firewalls used to cost thousands of dollars. Now, a sophisticated device with a firewall like the Net gear FR 315 costs about \$250, and as a result, more and more businesses track Internet use as part of basic security monitoring.

Privacy intrusions also come from web sites that users browse. As one congressional representative put it:

“Unlike shopping in a mall or browsing through a library where individuals travel anonymously through the merchandise racks and library stacks, the Inter-



net is becoming less and less anonymous. Direct marketing firms are now trying to identify individuals as they surf the web to isolate where they visit and what they are viewing.

This new data collection practice is most often described as Internet profiling. Internet profiling describes the practice of joining a consumer's personal information with his or her Internet viewing habits.”

Hon. Gene Green of Texas

Web operators track viewing habits by leaving small files, called “cookies” on the computer that visits its site. Not all cookies are bad, and some are necessary. If you access a database on the Internet, a web operator will leave a cookie on your machine so that when you stop browsing the database, the data connection can be closed. This is done because database connections are finite - only a certain number of users can get on a database at once, and the database needs to be told when a connection is closed. But some cookies are used for nothing but tracking activity. You may have encountered this after using a search engine and searching for “memory chips” or “cameras”. If sellers of these components have paid the site, an advertisement might pop up on your screen for memory chips or cameras, or for things that you have looked for in the past. This is not a coincidence. The site has read the cookies on your machine and is targeting advertisement to you.

The Clinton Administration preferred to rely on industry self regulation to protect consumer privacy. In the 107th Congress, however, according to the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) (<http://www.epic.org>) 24 bills have been introduced in the Senate and 44 in the House to deal with privacy concerns.



Internet users can also help themselves. Computer programs are available to allow users to monitor the cookies that are being placed on their computers and to remove them. One of the best programs is called "Cookie Pal". It is available from Kookaburra Software (<http://www.kburra.com>).

An evaluation version is available with a 30-day time limit, and after 30 days users are expected to buy it or delete it. Even if you are not going to keep the software, it is worth trying out, since it will show you all of the cookies stored on your machine and allow you to delete them. If you prefer to use a free program to monitor cookies, try "Cookie Cop" from PC Magazine. The link to the program changes constantly; so you will have to go to <http://www.zdnet.com/pcmag> and enter a search for "Cookie Cop".

As if Internet users didn't have enough to worry about with cookies, lately another concern has come to the fore. Many "free" and some programs you purchase install small files on your computer that broadcast data back to the company

while you are on the Internet. These programs are known as "adware" programs by the advertising industry, and as "spyware" programs by the Internet community. This whole issue came to the attention of the Internet community when people discovered that RealPlayer, ( a popular and free program that allows users to play audio and video files on their computers), was sending information

back to the company. The

RealPlayer software assigned a GUID (Globally Unique Identifier) to each specific user.

That GUID was broadcast back to the company, along with other information, when the program was used. Although it is not exactly clear what that "other information" was, the suspicion was that it was information on what media the software

played.

Since the company required users to register and give personal information before using the free program, the potential existed to couple the music preferences of a listener with his or her personal information. The company has since issued a privacy policy that explains to users what they are sending back, and it has given users the option of disabling the GUID broadcast. If people do not read the pri-





vacy policy, though, and just download and install the free software, they would never learn that a GUID was created and would not know that they could disable it.

After the uproar with RealPlayer, the Internet community found that several other free programs created and broadcast a GUID for each user. These companies want to sell advertisers targeted advertising, and to do so, they need to keep track of users through a software generated GUID. If the GUID is not matched up with a name, then the advertising remains targeted but anonymous. But privacy advocates are worried that the information can be linked.



There are several programs that detect "spyware" on your system. One of the best of these programs is the free program called Ad Ware. The program is provided without charge and is available from <http://www.lavasoftusa.com>.

The Internet connects us to many great resources and allows us to do our work a lot more efficiently by connecting to our community. But when we use it, we should remember that it is not really free or anonymous. Users should read the privacy policies provided with software, especially free software, and understand what the software does before installing it.

## E Mail Discussion Groups

If you want to participate in an e-mail discussion group, it is easy to join. There are links in the left side of the [www.wnylc.com](http://www.wnylc.com) page for joining groups discussing Public Benefits, Disability Law, Housing (statewide and NYC) Medicaid, and Education Issues.

There are also groups for project directors in New York State. If you are a project director and want to participate in one of the project director groups, send and e-mail to [wnylc@wnylc.com](mailto:wnylc@wnylc.com).

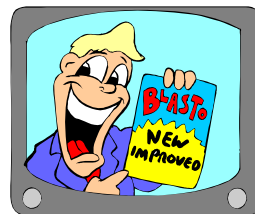




# Ad Blocking Software



Many free sites, like the New York Times website, are provided free of charge because advertising space is sold on the site. site, they are presented, some would say advertisements. Most people understand help pay for the site. But sometimes, the forcing users to download two to three for advertising than for the page. This slows and takes up time and bandwidth.



When users go to the “bombed,” with that the advertisements ads take over the site, times more information the loading of web pages

Often, you can stop an advertisement from loading by clicking on the “stop” button on your browser.



If you click the button too soon, the entire page stops loading; so wait until the text is displayed before clicking on “stop.”

Several programs are available to stop the loading of advertisements. WebWasher, <http://www.webwasher.com/> claims 4 million users. The cost is \$29 per computer but it is available for home and educational use free of charge.



AdSubtract <http://www.adsubtract.com/> is \$19.95 per computer and it too is free for personal use. Both of these programs stop advertisements and the obnoxious “popup” boxes from loading.





### For January 2001

Total Hits . . . . .	394,869	Most Active Hour. . . . .	10-11 a.m.
Total User Sessions . . . . .	18,757	Accessed Using Netscape . . . . .	27%
Average Hits/Day		Accessed Using Internet	
(Monday thru Friday) . . . . .	17,213	Explorer . . . . .	68%
Average User Sessions/		From Windows 95, 98 or	
Weekday . . . . .	756	NT . . . . .	90%

Most Active Day of Week. . . . . Thursday



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