

## ***The Bulletin***

### **Technical Tips**

By Tom Snyder Ph.D.

### **Adware and Spyware, the new Virus**

Adware and Spyware has become a serious problem. Currently, it ranks right up there with viruses in terms of being the most frustrating and destructive computer issue. If you are seeing new toolbars in your browser, excessive pop-ups, or your homepage has been switched, chances are you've got one or more on your machine.

Spyware has the ability to install additional software in your machine without your consent. It also has the ability to capture passwords, your credit card number and other personal information.

Popular adware components such as GAIN, GATOR, SAVENOW may also be installed on your system without your knowledge. Often these programs are installed through innocuous pop-ups or web-links that don't make it clear what they are doing. Some even masquerade as a service. For example, Gator provides a "remember your passwords" feature.

Adware and spyware slow down your system, can cause instability and crashes, eat up memory and hard drive resources, and can cause any number of malfunctions in popular software packages such as Office. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to identify and remove these components as there are so many and more are coming out all the time. Below is a method for helping you manage.

First, click on START - CONTROL PANELS – ADD/REMOVE PROGRAMS and check for the existence of programs you don't recognize, especially those listed above such as Gain, Savenow and Gator. Others such as search bars from Lycos are not recommended. Remove those using the REMOVE button option from the control panel.

Next, click on START – RUN and type MSCONFIG. Clicking on the STARTUP tab will show you all items which start up with windows. Often you can identify program processes here which shouldn't be loading. Uncheck those you suspect are adware. Such as Gstart, gator.exe gain.exe. Usually there will be a clue as to

what the process is by looking at the source directory. Be careful what you remove here. For instance VPTRAY.exe may look like a virus until you see that the command launches it from SYMANTEC which makes antivirus software. If something breaks after rebooting, you can also msconfig again and re-enable the program in startup.

As a final step, you may want to download a free checker utility such as AdAware from <http://www.lavasoftusa.com>. This utility will identify and remove harmful programs. Also note that the next version of Symantec's corporate antivirus program, version 9, will include protection against these types of programs.

===== If you have questions or concerns about your particular situation, please e-mail me at [tpsnyder@xantrion.com](mailto:tpsnyder@xantrion.com). I will use your input to direct future columns. =====