

Malware: Get It Out of Your System!

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Being online makes your computer vulnerable to a host annoying problems: virus infections, browser hijackers, adware and spyware. Collectively known as 'malware', they are all executable files that you unintentionally allow onto your system. They are more than annoying; they will invade your privacy and decimate your productivity.

Most everyone is familiar with computer viruses and has virus protection installed and updated regularly (you do, don't you?). Browser hijacking is a subject that deserves special treatment (click [here](#) to read my article on browser hijackers). The cost of receiving adware's unwanted marketing messages is hard to pin down because it is typically lost productivity. Spyware's goal is to report your browsing habits to a third party. Because it works quietly in the background, protecting your system from spyware is often ignored.

The risk of infection is very high. Particularly if you spend lots of time on the web and/or send and receive many files. My work requires me to do both, so I reevaluate my system security on a regular basis. Unfortunately, those who create malware and those who create malware removers are engaged in a never-ending game of leapfrog. As a result, literally thousands of programs are available which claim to detect, eliminate and protect against adware and spyware. But which one is best?

In evaluating the top-tier programs, I relied on firsthand experience, secondhand reports and published reviews. Obviously, performance and features are critical. Specifically, I measured each contender against the following criteria:

- ability to detect active infections (currently running)
- ability to detect 'sleeper' infections (lying dormant waiting to be triggered)
- ability to remove them thoroughly
- ability to provide real-time defense against future infections (regular updates)
- ease of use
- price

My conclusion? I enthusiastically recommend either [Spy Sweeper](#) by Webroot (\$39.95) or [Spyware Doctor](#) by PC Tools (\$29.95). Both applications allow you to run a test scan before you buy.

There is one more program you might consider: [Ad-Aware SE Personal](#) from Lavasoft. Ad-Aware outperforms other antispysware applications in one area: the ability to detect dormant adware and spyware. It does a reasonable job of detecting and removing existing infections. Its greatest weakness is that it offers no preventive protection. But guess what? It's free for personal use! I recommend using Ad-Aware on a regular basis.

Once you've installed your chosen applications, set them to update regularly and perform automatic scans. I set mine to update and run a quick scan every night and execute a complete scan once a week. When the software identifies a threat, it will guide you through the process of removal. You'll be sleeping easier knowing that these applications are fighting the bad guys for you.