

Disarming pop-ups

practice

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If you're annoyed by the pop-up windows that may appear while you're browsing Web pages on the Internet, you're not alone. In fact, pop-ups are so unpopular that the business of managing and blocking pop-up windows has emerged as another cottage industry in the computer world.

But pop-ups are more than annoying: They may also indicate that your computer has been infected with spyware. This article discusses some of the basics around pop-up windows and how to deal with blocking pop-ups themselves.

What are pop-ups and why should I care?

Pop-up advertising windows evolved as a way of showing additional information about a Web page without taking you away from the original Web page entirely. Advertisers and others seized on this opportunity to sell or present special offers to Web users. According to Nielsen NetRatings, a Web advertising researcher, the use of pop-up advertising has tripled over the last two years.

At the same time, the use of pop-ups and other unsolicited advertising has also taken a darker turn. Some spyware now

can present pop-up solicitations – which are frequently of questionable or offensive nature – even after you've closed your Internet browser. Having this material appearing on your computer could be upsetting to your staff, and damaging to your reputation.

Intriguing legal implications have arisen from the some of the pop-up advertisers, particular in the United States. In a recent case, a software company was ordered to shut down its advertising, which appeared in the form of pop-ups messages. Ironically, the software being advertised was a pop-up blocker!

Types of pop-ups

There are three basic types of pop-up windows:

1. *General browser pop-ups:* These can actually be useful and desirable. Many Web-based software applications rely on the use of pop-ups to present key instructions and information. Unfortunately, a great deal of Internet advertising is presented the same way.
2. *Windows Messenger Service pop-ups:* These often appears as grey banner ads with a "Messenger Service" line on

the title bar. While Windows Messenger Service has some applications in larger network environments, most users can and should disable this on their Windows 2000/XP/2003 computers.

3. *Spyware, adware, and other malware:* More recent and sophisticated pop-up advertising may be a symptom of having malicious software on your computer. These advertising pop-ups may offer offensive materials, and may even provide a means for unauthorized access to your computer and files.

Blocking pop-ups

Different approaches work best for each of the three primary types of pop-ups.

1. BROWSER POP-UPS

A variety of free or modestly priced software is available for download to deal with the problem of pop-ups. For example, the "Google toolbar" (available at toolbar.google.com) will prevent extra pop-up windows whenever you browse to a site. As well as being free and effective, the Google toolbar keeps count of the pop-ups it has blocked, and allows you to permit pop-up screens on a one-off basis simply by holding the <Ctrl> key when clicking on a link.

