

## **Is your computer infested with ads, popups, viruses and spyware?**

Maybe I can help with that. My name is Patrick Harvey, and I'd like to be your Realtor. (Of course if you already are working with someone you like, by all means keep using them. I don't want to steal a client from another Realtor, just as I wouldn't want them stealing my clients!)

So why the heck is a Realtor sending you a letter about computers?

It is because I spent many years as an embedded systems programmer, and still really enjoy messing around with computers. I don't want to get too rusty, so a little computer maintenance for a few friends does the trick.

Don't get me wrong, Real Estate is fun, too. And I'd love to have you for a client. That's really what this newsletter is all about. So if I can give you a little information that might help you with a computer problem, something you might have to deal with on a regular basis – maybe you'll remember me when it comes time to move. Because I've gotten pretty good at helping folks with that, too.

So – Is your computer infested with all sorts of junk you don't want? Do popup windows seem to erupt out of nowhere and ruin your internet experience? And does your machine seem to have gotten so slow that it almost grinds to a stop? There are a few things you can try to fix the situation.

I'll be the first to admit that quite recently, the adware and spyware writers – the people writing programs that invade your computer and try to take you to their own website to sell you something – have gotten quite sophisticated. And the steps I'll outline below will only address about 75% of the problems. And – new, more pernicious little software demons pop up every few days now. So even after trying these steps, you might still have to call a professional. And this process will probably take all day (!!)

[All the programs mentioned are free except for the big name antivirus software (Norton, McAfee, Trend Micro, etc)]

Once you have your machine cleaned up, how can you keep from getting more? Keep your machine up-to-date using Windows Update, and use an antivirus/spyware tool like Norton, McAfee, Trend Micro, etc. And avoid risky behavior. Getting a computer infection is not unlike getting a sexually transmitted disease! Avoid risky behavior!

Here are a few of the most likely places to pick up malware: Illegal / free music download sites and software. Porn sites. Gambling sites. Bad emails from people you know [Some worms infect computers, read the address book, email themselves to everyone in the address book – posing as the owner of that computer – so it appears that someone you know sent the email. Good antivirus

software prevents most of these]. Be careful of allowing ActiveX controls to install. These are special programs installed by some web sites to enable extra functionality. Microsoft's Windows Update uses ActiveX. Most of the infected machines I clean have had a teenager loose on them in the last month or two, and have music downloading and/or gambling software installed. So these are big things to watch. Read all your mail at hotmail or Yahoo! or some other web-based email site that has virus scanning built-in. Some service providers (like Cox) are doing some virus screening also.

This sounds really complicated – and, well, it is. But it is only the very tip of the iceberg in terms of removing spyware. There are a host of complex programs that I have to use pretty often to fix a really badly infested machine. And sometimes I don't win and have to reinstall the operating system!

Real estate is just as complicated. It is your Realtor's job to keep it simple for you – to handle all the possible problems and make sure your experience is as painless as possible. We try to get you the best possible price; to set up inspectors, repairmen, appraisers, and other professionals to make your transaction smooth. Many of us even work intimately with lenders to make sure there are no problems.

If you are in need of a Real Estate professional, give me a call. I'm sure I can help you.

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## SPYWARE and MALWARE removal:

- 1) If you are using a Macintosh, throw this letter away (but keep my business card!)! Macs, so far, are not being targeted by these problems since their market share is small. (Although likely this will change since Apple just announced support of "PC" hardware – so the Mac OS might run on your Dell machine!
- 2) If you are running something other than Windows XP then this probably is not for you, although many of these steps work with Windows ME, 95, and 98 also.
- 3) Try to go to the Windows Update website and download all of the critical updates for your computer. You should be running Windows XP SP2 (Service Pack 2). Sometimes the viruses and other malware will have destroyed the ability of your computer to reach the windows update web site (<http://update.microsoft.com>). Sometimes you can reach the site and do the downloads but they won't install. Then you have to try and remove all the spyware first, then try the update.
- 4) Download spybot search&destroy. This is a nifty spyware killer you can get at [www.download.com](http://www.download.com). The direct link is [http://www.download.com/Spybot-Search-Destroy/3000-8022\\_4-10122137.html](http://www.download.com/Spybot-Search-Destroy/3000-8022_4-10122137.html) (type it all on one line).
- 5) Run this program and get all the updates.
- 6) Download adaware from <http://www.javasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>
- 7) Run this program and get all the updates.
- 8) Download CWShredder from [http://www.intermute.com/spysubtract/cwshredder\\_download.html](http://www.intermute.com/spysubtract/cwshredder_download.html) This will be the latest version so no update is needed, but go ahead and run it.
- 9) Download the Microsoft anti-spyware tool, install, update, run, etc. You can find it at <http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx>
- 10) Make sure you have current recent antivirus software installed and updated. This can be Norton, McAfee, Trend Micro – it doesn't matter much, whichever one you prefer. You could also use the free "housecall" virus scan at [www.trendmicro.com](http://www.trendmicro.com), although it may not have all the capabilities of the ones you actually have to pay for.
- 11) After you are SURE that you have all this software with all the most recent updates, virus signatures, etc. then RESTART your machine in safe mode. To do this, you go to Start->Turn off computer->Restart. As the machine restarts, press the F8 key. You have to press it at just the right time, usually just before windows starts to load. You can also just press it repeatedly as the machine is restarting, eventually you'll get it right and you will get a list of options. Use the arrow keys and pick "Safe Mode". This mode of operation loads windows with a bare minimum set of things and hopefully a minimum amount of malware.
- 12) When the machine has restarted, select "Yes" when it asks you if you want to continue in safe mode.

- 13) NOW run Spybot SD, AdAware, The Microsoft anti-spyware program (make sure you configure it to do a FULL scan, not the quick scan), and run CWShredder. Also run a full scan with your virus software (unless you opted for the free housecall scanner which you can't use in safe mode since it depends on a network connection).
- 14) When all these programs have completed their scans, you can reboot the machine (no F8 for safe mode this time). If your updates did not install back in step 3, then you can try to install them now.
- 15) If you still have popups, or if your updates won't install ... time to call a professional.

If you are computer savvy and want to risk it, you can edit your startup settings by running msconfig; you can use specialized tools like LSPFIX and HijackThis and several other tools. But if you know how to use them, then probably you don't need this letter. You can really foul things up using the advanced tools – be careful!