

Consumer Warning: Laptop Thefts

Laptop theft is a growing epidemic, and unfortunately the theft costs most companies much more in lost data than the cost of equipment itself. Last year more than 600,000 laptops were stolen in the United States at a cost of \$47,107 per organization in lost data according to the FBI and the Computer Security Institute.

I am submitting this article because of an incident that I experienced and could not explain, but after reading an article in the March 2004 Laptop magazine I think I finally have an explanation. A couple of weeks ago a person entered my shop with a laptop that was in a shipping box. The man claimed to be the owner of the laptop and the president of the company that the shipping box was addressed to. This man wanted to sell this laptop claiming that he had too many computers. The problem is he was asking way too little for the laptop and when I asked him for proof that he owned the laptop, a receipt, he stated that he didn't get one because he bought it online. I was suspicious, it sounded too good to be true, so I asked him to print the receipt off the Internet and bring it back and then I could purchase it from him. I have not heard from him since.

I didn't know what to make of this incident, if it was truly his laptop he should have had a receipt for it. On the other hand if it wasn't his laptop why did he have all of the packaging and know so much about the company? Well after reading the Laptop Magazine article I think I may have figured it out. In 2003 the FBI began to record a new type of criminal activity called "office creepers." These criminals enter an office dressed in appropriate attire pretending to be a member of the staff. In a matter of minutes the criminal is out the door with a laptop or any other easily pawned electronic device.

After finding out that 1 out of 14 laptops will be stolen in the United States this year I decided to research what a person can do to safeguard their laptop. First of all if you do a lot of travel and use your notebook on the go invest in a laptop lock. These locks cost between \$30 and \$99 dollars and will attach to a special lock port on the side of your laptop. This type of security device is great for the next time you're at the coffee shop or the airport terminal and need to use the restroom. If however you're unsuccessful at keeping your laptop out of a thief's hands then you will want to be prepared.

Before your laptop is stolen it would be wise to take some precautions to limit the damage. Most importantly the laptop can be replaced, the data however, in most cases cannot be easily replaced. To protect you and your data be sure to backup your data. Most new laptops come with a CD burner, use that on a regular basis to backup your documents. If your system did not come with a CD burner then you could always add an external burner or other backup device. Next it would be a great idea to label the bottom of your laptop with your name and telephone number using a permanent marker. While you are labeling the bottom of your laptop you should take inventory of your laptop and other peripherals. Record your equipment's make, model and serial number and store it in a safe place so that you can retrieve this information for the police and your insurance company.

Lastly, if you're planning on purchasing a used laptop and the deal seems too good to be true, then you can check a web site that allows police and other departments to record stolen equipment in a database. The National Computer Exchange sponsors the web site, www.stolencomputers.org.

Hopefully you will never be a victim of a laptop theft, but if you are, taking these precautions should get you back up to speed in no time. If you need advice concerning your computer call Thomas, Roger or Scott at Computer Depot, 947-0749.