

Your Personal Privacy Is At Risk Whenever You Take Your Computer To A Repairman

January 9, 2017 - There is a very interesting article in TechDirt this morning about the FBI paying employees of Best Buy's Geek Squad to become informants for the agency. Specifically, the author states that that Geek Squad computer techs are being paid to search through the hard drives of computer that are being repaired to find evidence of illegal activity. If true and it does appear to be true what the FBI is doing raises huge privacy concerns for anyone who needs to have their computer repaired. Here is what you need to know before you call for a computer technician.

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To be clear, our concern here isn't that computer technicians are looking for illegal activities. Our concern is privacy. Virtually everyone today has copies of documents on their computer that they don't want anyone else to gain access to. Things like copies of tax returns, medical records, wills and trusts, etc. The information contained in these documents can be highly personal and in some cases such as with tax returns provides all of the information needed to commit identity theft.

Just because a computer tech is a paid informant for the FBI is no reason to believe that he isn't also willing to steal your identity. It stands to reason that the FBI informants may also have criminal records.

There is also no reason to believe the FBI is only hiring computer techs from Geek Squad as paid informants. Any computer tech you use could be paid to snoop by law enforcement agencies.

This isn't just an issue for home-use personal computers either. In fact, computers used for business may be even more vulnerable. In many cases, business computers contain the confidential information of many clients. Calling a repairman for one of these computers could potentially cause a data breach. For people like attorneys, accountants and doctors a data breach can have other ramifications. The release of confidential information by these types of professionals can irreparably harm their clients and could leave them liable for any damages.

The solution to prevent snooping is encryption. You don't need to be a computer technician to use encryption. There are numerous user friendly encryption programs available at reasonable prices. There are also a number of free encryption programs available. But if you are going to use encryption software, the time to install it is now not when you need to have your computer fixed.

If you don't feel like installing encryption software, there is another alternative. That is to store your sensitive files on something other than your computer's hard drive. You could use a flash drive or even a CD. Nobody can snoop through files that are stored somewhere else.

byJim Malmberg

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