Stealth Mode Utilities

by M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP
Associate Professor, Information Assurance
Norwich University, Northfield VT

Some years ago I was looking at privacy-protection software and ran across an interesting note on the Web page of a particular product (the specific product is not the point of this essay). The product (let’s call it “MyLittleSecret”) provided the following functions:

- MyLittleSecret™ can run at an interval of your choosing (every 1 min, 5 min, hour, etc.);
- MyLittleSecret™ can destroy specific records from your Web-browsing sessions;
- It can clear Netscape & Internet Explorer Cache, Cookies and Toolbar entries;
- Clears Internet Explorer History;
- Clears out America Online cache/cookies;
- Automatically empties Recycle Bin and clears out temp folder (C:\TEMP);
- Clears out StartMenu->Documents folder and last Find/Run folder;
- Advanced settings let the user customize default directories;
- Can run periodically in the background without any user intervention.

So far so good. Based solely on the description, it looked like a potentially excellent tool for maintaining confidentiality on one’s workstation.

However, my eyebrows rose when I saw the next part of the blurb, which I quote exactly: “MyLittleSecret™ hides in memory so that nobody will know you are using it! Use Stealth Mode to hide the program in memory under a different name. Combine this with Password Protection so that not only will nobody know what you are running, but they won’t be able to get to it.”

Hmm, this sounded a little alarming for network administrators. Stealth mode? For a utility that prevents tracking of what employees are doing with corporate resources? Didn’t sound good to me. Some of the customer testimonials confirmed my fears:

- “My company’s computer policy is so strict - now I can visit the sites I want without leaving any trail. MyLittleSecret installed in seconds and was incredibly easy to customize!” – Sarah, New York

- “I have recently download [sic] MyLittleSecret to find it is an EXCELLENT idea. I find the stealth mode extremely useful -- combined with the password facility, it’s ingenious! My surfing habits are nobodies business.. [sic] Finally a product that understands this” –
Sally, United Kingdom

- “I am extremely impressed with your warp drive customer service!!! I also am impressed with the potential for this great little utility! I work for the ‘State’. I needed some way to protect my web experience -- AND YOUR most excellent utility is just the Jedi mind trick I have been looking for!!! I have passed this information on to several friends at our office so they too can have a life!!” Janet, Michigan

More in the next column.

* * *

A Master’s degree in the management of information assurance in 18 months of online study from Norwich University – see <http://www3.norwich.edu/msia> for details.

M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP is Associate Professor in the Division of Business and Management at Norwich University in Northfield, VT. Mich can be reached by e-mail at <mailto:mkabay@norwich.edu>; Web site at <http://www.mekabay.com/index.htm>.

Copyright © 2005 M. E. Kabay. All rights reserved.

Permission is hereby granted to Network World to distribute this article at will, to post it without limit on any Web site, and to republish it in any way they see fit.