

## **NETSCAPE AND PRIVACY**

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I received an incredibly important email message on 13 July from Gibson Research Corporation. GRC is Steve Gibson's company, which produces SpinRite and other great products. SpinRite has been on my "must have" list for well over 10 years, and I am an avid reader of Steve's excellent writings on a number of topics. I highly recommend his products, and his website (<http://grc.com>).

Internet security has been a major topic of Steve's writings lately, and his recent message is so important that I asked for and received permission to reprint it here. The original message, titled "The NetZip, Netscape/AOL, and Real Networks Download Utilities \*ARE\* Spying On Us!" was sent as their July 2000 newsletter. So here it is, just as I received it.

Before I tell you about this latest threat to our privacy, I MUST ASK YOU PLEASE not to reply directly to this email. This mailing is being sent to more than 320,000 people, so there is JUST NO WAY for us to read and answer individual questions.

However, we have created a FREE DISCUSSION FORUM you are invited to use for asking questions and getting more information. Any standard Internet newsreader -- like those included in Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator -- can be used to participate in the free discussion forums at [grc.com](http://grc.com). Just click this link to launch your reader and begin participating: "[news://grc.com/newsletter](mailto:news://grc.com/newsletter)". Or, if that doesn't work, you can access the forum through our web-based interface (though it is much less cool.) <http://grc.com/newsletter.htm>

### **A SERIOUS New Spyware Threat.**

NetZip's "Download Demon" was purchased by Real Networks and renamed "Real Download". Later, Netscape/AOL licensed it from Real and called it "Netscape Smart Download."

By watching the "packet traffic" flowing in and out of one of my machines while downloading a file through the Internet, I verified the rumors which you may have heard regarding these programs: All of these programs immediately tag your computer with a unique ID, after which EVERY SINGLE FILE you download from ANYWHERE on the Internet (even places that might not be anyone else's business) is immediately reported back to the program's source where it is logged and recorded along with your machine's unique ID. They also have the opportunity to capture and record your machine's unique Internet IP address.

This information is then compiled and used to create a detailed "profile" about who you are based upon the web sites you visit and the files you have downloaded.

Perhaps you don't mind being watched and tracked as you move around the Internet ... and then having every file you download logged and cataloged and used to assemble "your profile". But the idea of this seems extremely invasive to me, and unless you have carefully read the program's license you might not be aware that this is going on or that "you agreed to it" when you accepted the terms of the license!

More than 14 Million people are already using the original NetZip Download Demon. NetZip knows the exact number, since every copy of their program "phones home" to report on what their users are doing! And I'm sure people are downloading Real Network's RealDownload and Netscape's SmartDownload like crazy.

A Class Action lawsuit was recently filed against Netscape/AOL because of this privacy invasion, so perhaps the PC industry will begin to receive the message that this sort of secret spying and profiling is not okay with the rest of us, even if it is buried within a lengthy license agreement. You decide.

And, of course, the next release of my own OptOut spyware detection and removal utility WILL consider these programs to be dangerous, and warn its users of their presence in their systems. But I wanted to be sure that you knew RIGHT AWAY what was going on, and that I had independently confirmed that this invasive file download tracking really was occurring.