

# Old hard drives still tell your secrets

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In revising the O&O Study, 'Data Data Everywhere,' 200 used hard disks were purchased on eBay and scanned for existing data. On more than 70% of this used storage media O&O discovered some sort of personal or business data. In some cases, the data found were quite staggering. The O&O Study describes the reasons why data are not securely deleted and presents solutions for improving data security for both private and business users.

The Berlin-based O&O Software is today releasing its freshly updated study, "Data Data Everywhere 2005." This particular study tackles the issues concerning the secure deletion of personal and company data on used storage volumes that have been discarded or resold. In order to gather data for this study, 200 hard disks were bought and scanned for all deleted data still accessible on them.

Enlisting the help of such standard store-bought products as O&O UnErase or O&O DiskRecovery, data could easily be detected and then

made accessible on more than 70% of the tested hard disks. Of the 3.3 million files found on these test drives, analysts at O&O were able to reconstruct more than 40,000 Word Documents, about 15,000 Excel Spreadsheets, and around 50 e-mail mailboxes containing their entire message stashes still intact from previous users.

The results in 2005 are alarming. Even if the rate of recovered data has slightly fallen in comparison to the results of the 2004 study, the integrity of the found and recovered data is still very high.

Because a growing number of common daily tasks today are done with the aid of a computer or the Internet, used hard disks can open a window into the private or professional lives of their previous owners. From important marriage documents and appointments made by e-mail, to scanned credit cards and work or school performance evaluations, documents of every kind have been found.

But private users are not the only ones that exercise a lack of precaution with their data. The same has been found to be the case with companies and institutions. As this study shows, even large and well-staffed companies have been known to release sensitive data by way of discarded hard disks. In one particular case, a number of files concerning credit ratings at a large bank were found. It is doubtful that the tagline "Highly Confidential" would succeed at stopping any would-be readers from having a look.

In fact, the study proves that companies and institutions need improvement when it comes to deleted data security. On the majority of hard disks tested in this year's test group, O&O was able to gain easy access to sensitive data of all kinds, confirming again the results of last year's study.

In addition, the study covers the potential causes leading to inadequate

data protection. Next to careless user behavior on the computer, the main cause cited in the study is the simple lack of user knowledge. This lack of knowledge is only exacerbated by commonly believed myths, not the least of which is the myth that the formatting of a hard disk means the secure deletion of all of its data.

To prevent the danger of such misuse, the study presents users with tips for improving the protection of their data on their hard disks. Simple and easily implemented software solutions, such as O&O SafeErase, are suggested here as the best methods for achieve such improvements.

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