

Companies agree to settle computer spying charges

September 26 2012, by Richard Lardner

(AP)—A software program developed to track the locations of rented computers secretly collected confidential and personal information about consumers, including medical records, bank statements and even web cam pictures of couples engaged in sex, the Federal Trade Commission said Tuesday in a settlement that bars eight companies from any further cyber spying.

The case involved seven rental companies and a firm called DesignerWare LLC of North East, Pennsylvania, which licensed its PC Rental Agent software to stores so they could shut off and recover computers that hadn't been returned in time or had been stolen.

But the software could do much more than that, the commission said. When an add-on program known as Detective Mode was activated, the software could capture computer screen shots, furtively take photos using the computer's webcam, log key strokes and trick consumers into providing personal contact information, according to the FTC.

Detective Mode could gather data every two minutes that a computer is connected to the Internet until the program is directed to stop. The information would then be forwarded from DesignerWare's servers to the rental store that activated the program, according to the FTC.

"In numerous instances, Detective Mode webcam activations have taken pictures of children, individuals not fully clothed, and couples engaged in sexual activities," the FTC said.

The commission said the settlements prohibit the companies from further illegal spying, from activating any location-tracking software without customer consent and from deceptively collecting information about consumers.

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Companies agree to settle computer spying charges (2012, September 26) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-companies-spying.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.