

Spy Tech

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Maintaining your privacy while you are online is becoming a greater challenge. In addition, the threat of someone else hijacking your identity is more than science fiction—it could definitely happen. (For information about what action you should take if your identity has been stolen, see “I Want My Life Back” on p. 49.) The web sites featured in this article can help you find out how much of your personal information is available to others. After you have completed this detective work, be sure to check out month’s “Product Snapshots” on p. 50 for more spy-like products.

WEB SITES

The first place you should start when you are investigating privacy issues is your credit report. Even if you are not in the market for any kind of loan in the near future, you should check out what information the three major credit bureaus know about you. Various sources, other than lenders, use credit reports to determine your eligibility for certain privileges. For example, potential landlords and employers can obtain your credit report from the following credit bureaus:

- **Equifax** (www.equifax.com)
- **Experian** (www.experian.com)
- **TransUnion** (www.transunion.com)

Several companies can provide you with a compilation of all three companies’ reports. For example, **Creditreports.com** (www.creditreports.com) will send you a three-agency credit report for U.S. \$39.95. You can request a single-agency credit report for U.S. \$19.95.

ConsumerInfo.com (www.consumerinfo.com) provides a free credit report from one of the above-mentioned credit bureaus with registration at the web site. Registration is free for the first 30 days. Thereafter it costs U.S. \$69.95 per year. As a registered member of the ConsumerInfo.com web site, you can order a three-agency credit report for U.S. \$36.95.

As you are well aware, many popular search engines not only perform searches for the location of information and products listed on the Internet, but they also perform searches for the location of people. For example, both **Excite** (www.excite.com) and **Lycos** (www.lycos.com) provide these services free. However, the data bases that these web sites search are not the only sources of personal information on the Internet. The following web sites search additional sites for more personal information, often for a fee.

The most inexpensive web site I found that performs personal information searches is **Knowx.com** (www.knowx.com).

Searches range between U.S. \$1 to U.S. \$20. However, as the saying goes, you get what you pay for. Knowx.com works as a typical Internet search engine does. To begin a search, you simply enter a name and a state. Knowx.com then returns a list of possible matches, from which you can purchase the full details of the record. However, Knowx.com gives no guarantee that the information you purchase will actually be the information you are looking for.

National Search & Discovery (www.nation-search.com) provides both free and for-cost searches. All free Internet people searches query archived data bases. These free searches query information such as phone book data bases and other published data bases. Sometimes querying these free data bases result in the information you are seeking. However, if you have an unlisted number, have recently moved, or are not listed as the head of the household, then you will quickly discover the incompleteness of archived data base searches. If you are looking for more complete information, you can use National Search & Discovery’s Power Search.

National Search & Discovery’s Power Search queries privileged information network systems. These network systems are updated every 24 hours and are the same network systems used by the major credit bureaus. This extensive search capability ensures an exceptionally high success rate. Each Power Search is conducted by an actual person, and the results are returned to you within 24 hours.

Web Detective (www.web-detective.com) requires you to sign up for an online membership. With that membership, you have six months of unlimited access to online professional investigation resources. You can find out who has information about you, where it is located, what it says, and, if possible, how it can be deleted or corrected.

If you are responsible for hiring new employees, you may want to consider enlisting the help of **Backgrounds Online** (www.backgrounds-online.com). Backgrounds Online can perform identity verification scans, and it can search public records, credit reports, criminal histories, national wants and warrants, worker’s compensation records, and driver’s records. Backgrounds Online can verify an applicant’s employment, education, credentials, and references.

Backgrounds Online develops and maintains all of its computer systems and software, including a proprietary data base containing billions of public records. Before service is provided by Backgrounds Online, you must complete a customer service agreement and an account application. Before the application is accepted, Backgrounds Online performs a

I Want My Life Back

While you are searching through the information provided by the web sites mentioned in the main article, if you determine that someone else is using your good name (and personal information for that matter), you should consider taking the following actions:

- Immediately report the incident to the police, especially if it involves stolen identification. Insist on receiving a complaint number.
- Immediately report all stolen cards or credit card numbers to the issuers, and request new credit cards. You should also make sure that you follow up with written notification.
- Notify your bank if your checks were stolen, and close your account.
- Be prepared to fill out affidavits of forgery to establish your innocence for banks, credit grantors, and recipients of stolen checks.
- Contact the Social Security Administration if someone is using your social security number for employment purposes. If your social security number is used only to establish credit or new accounts, changing your social security number may result in future complications.
- Get a new card, account number, and password if you use an ATM card for banking services. Do not renew your old password.
- Notify the postal inspector if you suspect mail theft. Theft of mail is a felony. ●

detailed background check including business credit reports, corporate records, liens, judgments, bankruptcies, civil filings, and trade references.

US SEARCH.com (www.ussearch.com) is a relatively inexpensive option for learning what information others know about you. Using US SEARCH.com, you can obtain addresses, aliases, phone numbers, property ownership, court records, judgments, license verification, corporate affiliations, and date of death information. Prices range from U.S. \$5 to U.S. \$250 depending on how much information you would like.

US SEARCH.com accesses multiple geographically dispersed public record data bases and then compiles, formats, and then presents the information in an easy-to-understand format.

AAA Background Checks (www.aaa-bc.com) combines electronic searches with human expertise. When necessary, background specialists determine what specific information will best meet your particular needs. In addition, trained specialists determine that the searches they perform are actually focusing on the correct subject, rather than simply searching for someone with the same name. In this way, you are assured of a valid search. AAA Background Checks can provide a background profile or target specialized areas of interest for you. Unless you request otherwise, your search results will be sent to your e-mail address.

Prices for searches range between U.S. \$60 and U.S. \$140, depending on the information required.

NETWORK RESOURCE

If you need information about upcoming conferences, trade shows, or other educational events, visit **SeminarPlanet.com** (www.seminarplanet.com). SeminarPlanet.com features more than 20,000 continuing educational events. In addition, SeminarPlanet.com has partnered with thousands of asso-

ciations, universities, and corporations to ensure that the information at SeminarPlanet.com is always updated and accurate.

SeminarPlanet.com's search engine enables you to search for events by industry, topic, date, and location. If your company is planning to hold an event, you can advertise that event at SeminarPlanet.com.

SeminarPlanet.com also contains career management information that focuses on continuing education for professionals in technology, law, accounting, medicine, and finance.

GAME OF THE MONTH

This month, our games guru, Eric Quigley, recommends *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* from Black Isle Studios—the sequel to the popular *Baldur's Gate* game.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn takes place in the wealthy kingdom of Amn, which was once ruled by the Calimshan but is now independent. The kingdom is located south of the Cloudpeak Mountains, the original *Baldur's Gate* southernmost border. During your adventures, you visit many places, such as the Elven Forests of Tethir, the Cloudpeak Mountains, the Underwater cities of the Sahuagin, the pirate isles, the Astral Plane, cities of the Underdark, and even the hell-like Abyss.

Before you begin playing *Baldur's Gate II*, you can familiarize yourself with the interface and learn how to control your character by using the detailed tutorial, which is unrelated to the main story. When you actually start *Baldur's Gate II*, you create one character of your choice. Throughout the adventure, you meet many different people who can join your party. (Your party can include up to six characters.)

If you are a fan of the original *Baldur's Gate* game, you almost certainly have developed a favorite character. *Baldur's Gate II* allows you to import this character. You can keep your ability scores and your special abilities.

Baldur's Gate II begins several months after the Sarevok's fall in the original *Baldur's Gate*. When you begin the game, you are imprisoned in Athkatla, the capital of Amn, together with Imoen, Jaheira, and Minsc, who you probably remember from the original *Baldur's Gate*. You don't know who your captors are, but you do know that you don't



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Product Snapshots

My favorite part of spy movies is when the agent is introduced to his (or her) arsenal of the latest gadgets in spy technology. So, I have scoured the Internet to find some of today's spy software and gadgets that you can own. Please note that these are first-look reviews; I have not conducted exhaustive testing.

CYBER-DETECTIVE TOOLKIT

The Cyber-Detective toolkit provides you with a "how to" guide, as well as a large selection of tools and databases to help you search for personal information. You can use the built-in e-mail address search, people search, and street address search features.

The Cyber-Detective Toolkit also provides an extensive list of the sources that are available on the Internet—which can even be accessed right from the program. In addition, the Cyber-Detective Toolkit provides a searchable database of all the offline public government sources that can be found throughout the United States. This database contains complete contact information and notes on each source. The Cyber-Detective toolkit will even print envelopes addressed to any source that you choose.

You can purchase the Cyber-Detective Toolkit from www.cyber-detective.net for U.S. \$9.99.

VOICE-CHANGING PHONE

The elegantly styled voice-changing phone protects your identity during phone conversations. The telephone's easy-to-use controls allow you to digitally change your voice. This unit offers seven different masking levels, allowing your voice to sound as low or as high as you want.

The voice-changing phone also includes the following features:

- Tone/pulse switchable
- Last number redial
- Electronic mute
- No power needed—just plug in to a telephone line

The voice-changing phone is available through Thomas Investigative Publications, Inc. for U.S. \$169. For more information, visit www.pimall.com/nais/vcphone.html.

INSTALL AND FORGET TRACKING SYSTEM 1115

The Install and Forget Tracking System (INFS) 1115 from CCS International is a vehicle-tracking system that informs you where

your vehicles have been anywhere in the United States. The INFS 1115 vehicle tracking system uses technology developed and maintained by the U.S. Department of Defense to monitor and track vehicles from coast to coast. In addition, the system can report the total route, rate of speed, stop times to the minute, and total miles.

The INFS 1115 system includes the INFS 1115 GPS Unit, a magnet-mount GPS active antenna, power adapters, computer download cable, and TravelEyes software on CD. You also receive maps of your city, complete with street names.

For more information about the INFS 1115, visit www.spyzone.com/catalog/trackingrecovery/inf.html or call 1-212-557-3040.

2.4 GHZ COLOR VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

The 2.4 GHz Color Video Surveillance System's tiny surveillance and security camera transmits a 2.4 GHz signal with clear sound and vivid color to a 2.5 inch TFT active matrix screen on an ultra-compact monitor more than 300 feet away.

The discreet camera has a tiny microphone housed near the tiny lens. The camera can rest on a shelf or tabletop and runs on four AA batteries. The receiver and monitor plug in, using an included adapter. In addition, audiovisual cables enable you to view events on your television or record these events on your VCR.

The 2.4 GHz Color Video Surveillance System is available through Sharper Image retail stores for the suggested price of U.S. \$439.95. For more information about the 2.4 GHz Color Video Surveillance System, visit the Camera and Optics section of www.sharperimage.com.

KPC-500 BLACK AND WHITE CAMERA

You can place the KPC-500 Black and White Camera anywhere. It is approximately the size of a dime, but it requires only a 1/16 inch viewing hole. The metal shield that encases the KPC-500 Black and White Camera protects the circuit board from dust, humidity, and contact with other metal objects.

The KPC-500 Black and White Camera's electronic shutter automatically compensates for lighting changes. In addition, more than 420 lines of resolution, 0.1 lux, and an F2.0 lens ensure detail and clarity. The KPC-500 Black and White Camera includes a 9-volt power supply and a mounting bracket.

The KPC-500 Black and White Camera is available through SpyOutlet.com for U.S. \$79.95. For more information about the KPC-500 Black and White Camera, visit www.spyoutlet.com. ●

want to stay in there forever. First, you have to free yourself and the others, and then you must find out who captured you. If you imported a character, that character's equipment has been taken by the captors. If you begin with a new character, you will have nothing at all (except your clothes, hopefully).

In Baldur's Gate II, you face an uncertain future, with a lineage that tempts the unscrupulous to use you and the ignorant to fear you. You face a foe who views you as worthless and dispensable.

This villain's goals go beyond a simple quest for power: He wants evil to reign. To conquer your enemy, you may have to align with one of the lesser evils.

You can play Baldur's Gate II in stand-alone mode or in multiplayer mode. The multiplayer mode supports up to six players via a network, TCP/IP, modem, or serial connection. Each player must have a copy of the full game. Baldur's Gate II supports Windows 98 and 95. In addition, several Baldur's Gate online communities exist. For more informa-

tion about these communities, visit www.baldursgateii.com.

You can purchase Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn through retail channels for the suggested price of U.S. \$44. For more information about Baldur's Gate II, visit www.baldursgateii.com.

We want to hear from you. You can send your review of a great web site, network resource, game, or new product to editors@nwconnection.com. If we print your review, we'll send you a free NetWare Connection T-shirt. ●