

COMPROMISED PERSONAL DATA IS DANGEROUS

A while back a friend of mine purchased a laptop from a rental agency. When he brought it home he found that it was still loaded with old software and data so he called me in to clean it up. I took his laptop to my shop and started to analyze the contents of the hard drive to determine what should be deleted and what should remain.

After working on it for only a few minutes it was definitely apparent to me that my friend's concerns were warranted. On cursory inspection I found it to contain over 75mb worth of data from 3 of the previous laptop renters. On further investigation I found contracts between the Renter's company and other company's detailing the deal they were working on and the financial information associated with it. This information was not very old either so it could have been very useful to an unscrupulous individual. I also discovered a HUGE amount of personal information describing the Renter's age, birth place, mother and father's name, brothers and sisters names, pet names, addresses for all of them, and names and ages of their children as well. I found Credit Card information, Loan information, Boyfriend and Girlfriend names, emails describing their activities over the last 2 years, where they went, when, and with whom they were. One of the three Renters even kept notes in their e-mail describing their sex life with their current partner and a list of their previous partners since college scaled by how good they were.

This is just highlights of what was left on the rental laptop, that was sold (fortunately for the previous 3 renter's) to my friend.

The Risk for criminals to abuse private information this detailed is off the scale. Identity theft, stalking and other predatory activities, or even just exposure, is something no one should risk – anything you type or say can be used against you in way too many ways. The list goes on and on as to how this much private information in the wrong hands could really destroy the innocently naïve user's life. So let's be careful out there and aware that your information in the wrong hands could lead to disaster for you and/or your family.

Epilog: After moving the information off of the hard drive to a Zip disk I called the last individual to rent the laptop to ask if they wanted their information. We spoke for a bit and I told the individual the dangers of leaving their information on the rental laptop. They assured me that they were aware of it and would make sure to delete it in the future. So I destroyed the information in my possession and wrote this report on the event.

My friend was happy with the work I did. The laptop was clean and healthy once again.

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