

# Solutions to Laptop Security

by Chris Sivori, JSJ Productions, Inc.

Laptop computers have become essential tools for modern business life, especially for on-the-go types and road warriors who need to take the office with them wherever they go. Due to the demands of our mobile lives, laptops have become increasingly more powerful, more expensive, and more dangerous to lose. In an age of widespread identity theft and cyber crime, the loss of one laptop can trigger a cascade of negative consequences: compromised customer records, personal information and trade secrets.

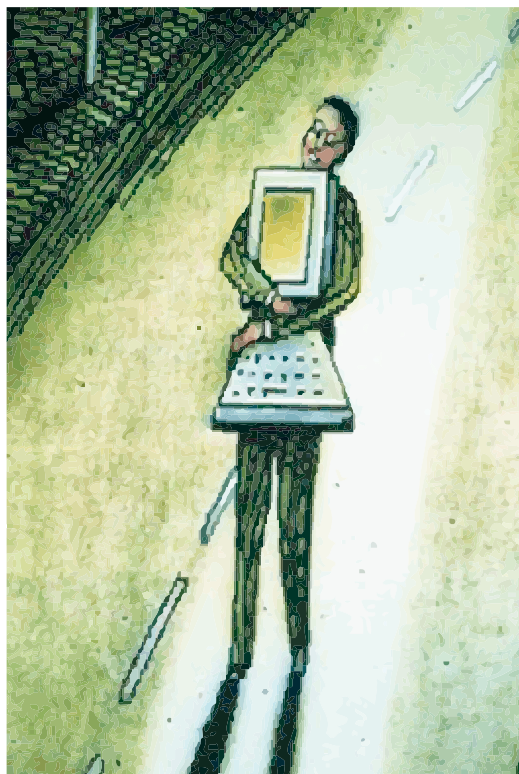
The San Francisco Chronicle reported recently on an increase in laptop theft in San Francisco coffee houses. One victim was actually stabbed in the chest for his laptop during such a robbery.

People working on the high-priced computers are easy targets. "You walk by any Starbucks and see people with a laptop, it's so tempting for the crooks. They walk in, right on top of the person, and the person has all their attention on the laptop. They snatch it right out from underneath their fingertips."

It's probably surprising that there aren't more incidents of laptop theft considering how expensive laptops can be. Many of us carry thousands of dollars of expensive technological gear wherever we go without a second thought. Luckily, there are a couple of options out there to help keep your laptop and information secure:

## Basic Security Precautions

- **Set and use a strong BIOS password.** While your computer is booting up, you can press the F1 key to enter your



machine's BIOS settings. From the BIOS settings menu, you can set a password that will prevent anyone from using your computer. It will simply not boot up into Windows. In some cases, as with Dell and IBM, this password cannot be reset without returning the laptop to the manufacturer. Be sure to register your laptop with the manufacturer and record your laptop's serial numbers. Even if your laptop is stolen, this will keep your information safely protected.

- **Asset tag or engrave your laptop.** One of the simplest ways to deter laptop theft is to have the laptop engraved or asset tagged with your personal or business contact information. This will make it harder for professional thieves to resell your computer and it will make recovery a lot easier in the event your laptop is stolen. According to the FBI, 97% of unmarked laptop computers are

never recovered. Clearly marking your laptops deters casual thieves and may prevent it from being resold online. Asset security tags and other security devices are available online at: [www.computersecurity.com/laptop/](http://www.computersecurity.com/laptop/)

- **Never let your laptop leave your sight.** It sounds obvious, but with so much important information and data available in one place, you should never let your laptop out of your sight. Laptops are one of the most commonly stolen devices since they are relatively small, and can easily be resold for hundreds of dollars. Laptops are routinely stolen in airports, hotel rooms, and even from offices by employees or cleaning staff. If you leave your laptop unattended even for a few minutes, lock it up.

- **Keep critical documents on a USB drive.** To minimize the loss or theft of your laptop, keep all of your critically important documents and files on an external USB thumb drive and keep it on you at all times. Many of the newer USB drives come with encryption software built-in to protect your USB drive in the event of loss or theft. Just be sure to make periodic backups of your external drive onto a CD-ROM or to your desktop computer.

## Anti-Theft Devices

- **Laptop cable lock.** For \$25-50, you can lock down your laptop with a cable lock that snaps into a specially designed Universal Security Slot (USS). Around 80 percent of the laptops currently produced come with a place to attach your security cable to the laptop chassis. While using your laptop, loop the cable around something that can't be moved like a table leg or a 1972 Chevy Nova. This option is available in a combo or key

form from manufacturers like Kensington ([www.kensington.com](http://www.kensington.com)).

### Tracking Devices

There are several products available that will allow your laptop to be tracked in the event it becomes stolen.

- **Laptop Lojack.** A company by the name of Computrace produces a product called "Lojack for Laptops" ([www.absolute.com](http://www.absolute.com)). The idea behind it is simple: track down stolen laptops. As soon as your laptop is stolen, you call the police to file a police report. Then you call Computrace and they set your laptop into "I've been stolen" mode. Basically, once the stolen laptop is connected to the Internet it sends notifications back to Computrace that help pinpoint its location by using the IP address, which is tied to the laptop's physical location.

Computrace then notifies the police with information sufficient to serve as a search warrant. This is a good solution unless the thief wipes the hard drive before he connects to the Internet. Computrace has partnered with Lenovo, the maker of IBM Thinkpads, to include the Computrace software on the actual BIOS chip. That way, even if the hard drive is wiped the software is still able to run and report back when stolen. Computrace claims that 90% of the laptops its customers report lost or stolen are either recovered or the data on them is destroyed using remote erase commands. Other similar products include: zTrace Technologies ([www.ztrace.com](http://www.ztrace.com)).


- **For Mac Users.** Orbicule Undercover - Orbicule makes a similar tracking program called Undercover that dials home when the laptop has been stolen. It also features support for iSight if you

have a built-in webcam and will take snapshots of the thief. One interesting feature is that it simulates a hardware failure by gradually darkening the screen. The hope is that if the laptop is sent to Apple for repairs and connects to the Internet while at Apple, undercover will detect the network settings and launch a special screen with instructions on how to return the stolen laptop to its rightful owner.

With a healthy sense of caution and a few useful tools you can keep your laptop and information safe and secure.

For additional questions, comments, or tips, drop us a line at [csivori@duetdesign.com](mailto:csivori@duetdesign.com).

Christopher Sivori is Chief Web Designer for JSJ Productions, Inc. and Marketing Strategist for Duet Design ([www.duetdesign.com](http://www.duetdesign.com)). Problems, questions or comments? Email Chris at: [csivori@duetdesign.com](mailto:csivori@duetdesign.com).

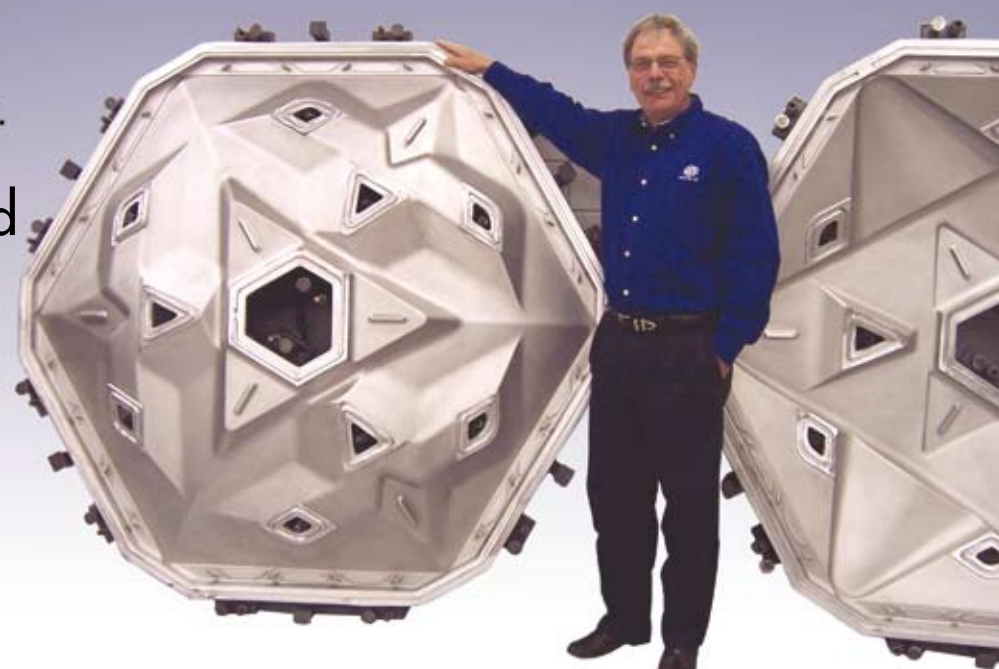


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