

The River Cities DAILY TRIBUNE

‘Living In a Tech World’ Column

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Traveling Round Trip with Your Laptop

Laptops for business travelers have been de rigeur for many years. Now, as more of us become more dependent on email and access to the web, it is not at all unusual to see folks who are clearly vacationing hanging on to laptops at the airport or packed away in their cars between the luggage and the family toys. The possibility of losing that laptop is scary enough but when you factor in compromising very private personal or business data it's enough to trigger thoughts of self-flagellation.

A recent survey conducted for Dell Computers found that over 12,000 computers a week are lost or stolen and 67% of those are never recovered. This survey was done among business travelers who you would expect to be used to traveling and taking precautions against such loss. Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago and the New York airports had the greatest number of losses but Austin (ABIA) was second in its size category with an estimated 165 lost computers every week. When you look at this survey you can't help but draw the conclusion that most of these computers are lost by carelessness but the lack of recovery is due to people who prey on inattentiveness of travelers a.k.a. thieves. So let's explore what you can do to protect this valuable asset or at least make the thief work to make their actions profitable.

Prevent the Loss

Here are some preventative measures to consider.

- Avoid using computer bags. Computer bags can make it obvious that you're carrying a laptop.
- Always take your laptop on the plane or train rather than checking it with your luggage. If you're traveling by car, keep your laptop out of sight.
- Keep your eye on your laptop. When you go through airport security don't lose sight of your bag.
- Avoid setting your laptop on the floor. If you have to set it down, try to place it between your feet or against your leg (so you're always aware it's there).
- Try not to leave your laptop in your hotel room but, if you must, use a laptop security cable to securely attach it to a heavy chair, table, or desk.

Make your computer difficult to use or sell and your data hard to get to

- Never leave access numbers or passwords in your carrying case.
- Permanently marking (or engraving) the outer case of the laptop with your company name, address, and phone number may greatly increase your odds of getting it returned. An obviously marked computer is also harder to sell.

- Consider a motion alarm for your laptop if you must leave it in a hotel room
- Biometric identification systems can be installed on some laptop models which allow your fingerprint to be your logon ID instead of a password.
- Enable a strong BIOS password. This is a password that must be entered before Windows is launched. Computers have different key combinations for getting into the BIOS but it is generally the 'del' key or F1 or F2 on the very first black and white screen you see. Add a strong Windows password and many thieves will give up. If they wanted hard work they probably wouldn't be thieves.
- Encrypt your data on your hard drive.
- Backup all your data to an external drive that you leave at home and/or backup any sensitive data to an on-line backup service and download it when you get to your destination. (See last week's column at our website for more on data backups.)
- Use tracking software to have your laptop call home. There are a number of vendors, like CompuTrace, that offer stealthy software solutions that enable your laptop to check in to a tracking center periodically using a traceable signal for an annual fee. In the event your laptop is lost or stolen, these agencies work with the police, phone company, and internet service providers to track and recover your laptop and some plans include remotely deleting all your data before recovery. Check out this column on our website for other companies.

So, stay in touch, email friends and relatives often, enjoy your trip and, most of all, travel safe.

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