



## 10 Tips to Keep Your Computer Safe from Thieves



Computers are all vulnerable to many threats, including power surges, assembly issues, static shocks, dust and viruses. A very serious but highly preventable threat to your computer is theft. This is especially true of laptops.

Some report that millions of laptops are stolen worldwide every year. I haven't seen the proof of those claims, but FBI statistics from 2008 and 2009 show that over 221,000 laptops had been reported stolen in the U.S.\* If owners hadn't kept a record of their computers' serial numbers then their stolen laptops were not included in the FBI statistics. And remember, the statistics do not include desktop computers, so the actual number of stolen computers is much higher.

Thieves apparently love laptops and why not? They are portable, expensive, easy to hide, and they are full of confidential information.

So what can you do to keep your computer and your computer files safe from thieves? Here are some handy tips:

1. **Never, ever leave your computer alone out in public.** It is tempting to take your laptop along with you to your favourite coffee shop or fast food restaurant. If, while you are enjoying your beverage you feel the urge to use the washroom, pack up your computer and take it with you. If you have to get extra napkins or ketchup, take it with you. Do not leave it unattended for even a minute. It only takes a second for somebody to grab it and run. Are you prepared to give chase? Don't take chances -- keep your computer with you.
2. **Hold onto your laptop bag when out in public.** Treat it like you should treat your purse or briefcase. It may be tempting to sling the bag over the back of a chair, or plop it down on the seat or table next to you, but that is inviting thieves to snatch and grab. Again, are you prepared to give chase? It is best to hold onto the strap. If you need to keep your hands free, put it on the floor and loop the strap around your leg. Make it impossible for thieves to try to grab your bag without you knowing. But don't forget it on the floor!
3. **Pick a laptop bag that doesn't look like a laptop bag.** Why advertise to the world that you are carrying a laptop? How many gym bags for instance are stolen versus how many laptop bags?
4. **Buy a lock for your computer.** We're talking an actual security lock that will enable you to lock your computer to something awkward or immovable with a cable. Many laptops, although not all, have a port where you can attach the lock. Check electronics stores for a lock that will work on your computer.
5. **At the airport or bus terminal, do not check your computer as luggage.** Airports especially are magnets for computer thieves. A lot of people travel with their laptops, and if you are one of them, take it on the plane or bus with you as a carry on. Do not let it out of your sight. Be extra careful when going through security. Wait until the person ahead of you has cleared security before putting your bag on the conveyor belt to be scanned. Pick it up right away on the other side.

6. **Don't leave your computer unattended in a hotel room or dorm room.** Hotels and dorms are alike in that the laptop owner is not the only person with access to the room. If you have to leave your computer behind, use the security lock to attach it to something substantial, or lock it in a cupboard. Put the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the hotel room door. If you are inside the hotel room, it is a good idea to use the deadbolt on the door. Hotel staff members have keys so protect your computer and yourself.
7. **Don't leave your computer in your car.** Ever. But if you absolutely have to, put it out of sight in the trunk. It is still much safer to keep it with you.
8. **Password protect your computer.** Always, always, always make sure your computer needs a password login before it can be used. If you have confidential information you need to protect, you can place passwords on those files and documents as well. And don't write down the password and keep it where thieves can find it.
9. **Add obvious identification markings to your computer.** Engraving your name or adding barcodes onto your computer will deter thieves. They probably steal computers to sell them, and nobody will buy one with obvious identification.
10. **Install an anti-theft program on your computer.** This will allow your laptop to be tracked after it has been stolen. You will know where it is, and even see a photo of the thief taken with the web cam.

Hopefully these tips will keep your computer and your files safe and sound and out of the hands of thieves. Being ever-vigilant is tough, and despite doing your best, your computer may still be stolen. And for that contingency we offer more tips.

#### **Here's what you can do to eliminate some of the stress if your computer is ever stolen:**

1. **When you first get your computer, you should always write down its serial number and model number.** Look for these on the bottom of your computer tower or on the bottom of your laptop. Write down a customer support phone number for the manufacturer of your computer. They will always ask you for the serial and model numbers, so it's very important to have that information handy.
2. **Keep the receipt.** Not just for your computer but any other equipment that may have come along with it. Your receipt is vital in these kinds of situations.
3. **Create a password for your computer that is not easy to guess.** Including a mix of both letters and numbers that still make sense to you is the best way to go.
4. **Keep an updated backup of all your important data.** You can choose to store it on disks or on an external drive, but ideally you should use offsite data backup software such as CollectionMine ([www.collectionmine.com](http://www.collectionmine.com)). This will ensure your backups are current, safe and secure, and private. If you have all of your files backed up, you'll save yourself a lot of time and stress if anything ever does happen to your computer.

No matter what measures you decide to take, your computer is one of the most important devices you use in your daily life and we urge you to keep it safe and protected. Hopefully you will have gotten some good ideas from our tips and will put them to work.

\* <http://www.mydellforum.com/archive/index.php/t-1796.html>