

IT'S CALLED FOISTWARE AND EVEN THE GOOD GUYS ARE DOING IT!

Foistware is a term used for software that's "foisted" on you, typically without your knowledge or explicit consent. Foistware isn't technically malware, but it can range from marginally useful, to annoying, to malicious. Most often, foistware takes the form of browser toolbars, but it can also take over your browser homepage and preferred search engines. Some foistware pops up when you visit online shopping sites and tries to steer you to certain vendors or offers.

Foistware almost always tags along when you download a program that you do want. Through various deceptive practices, the download process may try to add extra, unwanted software to your installation package. Usually it takes the form of a checkbox that's already selected, and if you just click NEXT or CONTINUE without reading carefully, you'll end up with this extra software clutter.

The purveyors of these pollutants will say that it's your fault for not paying attention, and to a certain point, they're right. Many users have become accustomed to clicking an endless series of Next, Next, Next to get through a software installation. Nobody wants to read those long, boring Terms of Service and the accompanying legalese. And plenty of users are not technically savvy enough to understand that a "recommended" toolbar, add-on or plugin is not in their best interests.

You might think this problem would show up mostly in the dark corners of the Web. But worst offenders are some of the most trusted and popular names in Internet software. If you try to download or update your Adobe Reader or Flash Player, Skype, or the Foxit Reader, you'll see examples of foistware. Adobe pushes the McAfee Security Scan. Foxit Reader is also guilty of pushing the useless Ask.com toolbar.

The Ask Toolbar is especially loathsome, because it has a delayed installer. You'll download your software and everything appears to be fine. No annoying popups or toolbars in your browser. But after lurking for ten minutes, the Ask Toolbar installer springs to life and does its dirty work. Later, you open your browser, and see the damage.