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## Sneaking Onto the Net

**Removable Memory Device Stores Personal Web Info**

**By Paul Eng**  
ABCNEWS.com

**Oct. 8— Afraid of who may be watching when you browse online at work? If so, there keep your surfing to yourself.**

A tiny computer device may help workers keep their online activities at the office more private.  
ABCNEWS.com

There is good reason for concern about Internet privacy on the job. Many companies have strict policies warning employees against using corporate Internet connections for non-work related tasks such as shopping online or sending personal e-mails.

But many office workers conduct "harmless" online activities anyway, considering them not unlike making personal phone calls using the company phone.

Now, a small computer peripheral maker in Camarillo, Calif., thinks it has a way to help keep such online activities free from prying eyes.

The company has developed the StealthSurfer, a slightly modified "USB drive," or tiny solid state memory device that plugs into the USB port now commonly found on most personal computers.

Such memory devices function just like a computer's hard drive, with some models storing up to one gigabyte worth of data. But since they are removable, USB drives also function like an old-fashioned floppy disk drive. Once files are transferred onto the device, users can share the data by just simply reconnecting the drive to another computer.

Not only that, StealthSurfer can also use the removable memory concept to help surfers maintain their sense of privacy.

### Unique Edge?

A specially-modified version of the Netscape Internet browser is stored on the keychain-sized drive. The built-in browser is designed to store all traces of online information — so-called cookies, copies of Web pages, images, e-mails, and Web site passwords — on the device itself, rather than on the computer's hard drive.

Once a user removes the StealthSurfer from a PC, all the related Web data can go with the owner to another PC, say at home or at a public terminal at an Internet café. More importantly, the device also comes with a built-in password scheme to further protect the information should StealthSurfer become lost or stolen.

Brad Weber, president of Avita Group, which is behind the StealthSurfer, believes the portable Web browsing device will give it an edge among growing surge of portable USB drives currently in the market.

"It actually took us several months of [software] development effort," says Weber. "If some other USB maker wants to do it, they'll find it's not an easy thing to do."

Indeed, Sam Bhavnani, a mobile computing analyst with research firm ARS Inc. in San Diego, notes USBs have become the "next-generation floppy drive."

"The USB keychain memory devices have become a huge market and really exploded in the mobility space," says Bhavnani. "Most will use them just for simple file transfers."

Bhavnani says he's still working through the numbers on just how many USB drives will be sold this year. But he notes that some models have become so cheap, they're given away at many trade shows and conferences.

"What [makers] will start looking for are ways to differentiate themselves," says Bhavnani. "And as far as I know, [StealthSurfer] is the only one with such [privacy] functionality."

### **Anti-Stealth Concerns**

Still, others are quick to note StealthSurfer might not be a complete cure to online privacy at the workplace. For example, companies can still spy on employee's computer habits by installing "key loggers" — software that captures whatever a worker types on a computer keyboard.

And like a conventional computer hard drive, the StealthSurfer is vulnerable to online viruses and "spyware," or online programs that report back to Web sites where a surfer does online.

Still, Weber believes there is a market for the device.

"Lots of USB driver makers offer portability," says Weber. "But we offer privacy."

StealthSurfer is available now through the company's Web site, [stealthsurfer.biz](http://stealthsurfer.biz), for about \$50 to \$130 depending on memory capacity. ■