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NEWSLETTERS

The Office Letter Blink Section - Product Reviews

From Volume 4, Number 17
 (October 11, 2004)

StealthSurfer

Leave no traces behind. That's the idea of surfing the Web with StealthSurfer, a tiny USB device with a built-in browser that keeps all evidence of your browsing off your system. Whether you want to check e-mail on the road or surf from a public computer, StealthSurfer is a hardware-based security device that will keep your moves private.

The StealthSurfer plugs into any USB port. It's a USB 2.0 device, but it worked fine (though noticeably slower) on a USB 1.1-equipped system. On Windows 2000 and above, no additional drivers are needed. (You'll have to install a driver to use it with Windows 98, making it less plug-and-play painless for such systems.)

The operating system recognizes the device as a hard drive. Open any file management program and click on the only executable file listed in the folder of the drive, enter your password (which you can reset whenever you like), and then the drive's contents are unlocked. Click the "Start" icon (to run start.exe from the device) and Netscape 7.0 loads.



All history, cookies, and cache are kept on the device itself, not your system's hard drive, so when you're done and you unplug the gizmo, everything goes with you. For most download sites, Windows pops up with the destination drive already set to the drive letter of the device. Unfortunately, saving files from office.Microsoft.com seemed coded to be saved in your Documents and Settings folder of your C: drive, so you'll have to take the extra steps to select the device drive letter instead.

During boot up, the StealthSurfer checks to make sure its files are up to date and that all files needed are present. If, for example, you delete the cache folder (by mistake or on purpose), the StealthSurfer will recreate the folder structure for you before it launches Netscape. Speaking of settings, whatever you control through Netscape (such as deleting the cache) updates the files on the StealthSurfer itself. Thus, once you plug in the device, surf the Web, and disconnect, there are no traces of your activity left behind on the PC you just used.



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The StealthSurfer comes in four models: 128MB (\$99.29 -- the version we tested), 256MB (\$159.29), 512MB (\$199.29) and 1GB (\$299.29). On the 128MB edition, 32.4MB were consumed by the software, leaving 90.2MB free for downloads, cache, cookies, and other system files.

If you use public systems (my local libraries have banks of PCs) or want to check your e-mail at work, the StealthSurfer does a good job of maintaining your privacy.

For more information, visit <http://www.stealthsurfer.com>. A company spokesman told us that a version that includes support for Firefox should be available before the end of the year.

-- James E. Powell

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