



INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS OF TEXAS ATTORNEYS

The information included on this page is for educational and informational purposes only. Please consult an attorney regarding specific legal questions.

P2P File-Sharing: Evaluate the Risks

Every day, millions of computer users share files online. Whether it is music, games, or software, file sharing can give people access to a wealth of information. To share files through a peer-to-peer (P2P) network, you download special software that connects your computer to other computers running the same software, which often is free.

Sounds promising, right? Maybe, but make sure that you consider the trade-offs. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission cautions that file sharing can have a number of risks. For example, when you are connected to file-sharing programs, you may unknowingly allow others to copy private files — even giving access to entire folders and subfolders you never intended to share. You may download material that is protected by copyright laws and find yourself mired in legal issues. You may download a virus or facilitate a security breach. Or you may unwittingly download pornography labeled as something else.

To secure the personal information stored on your computer, the FTC suggests that you:

Install file-sharing software carefully, so that you know what's being shared.

When you load a file-sharing application onto your computer, any changes you make to the P2P software's default settings during installation could cause serious problems. For example, if you change the defaults when you set up the "shared" or "save" folder, you may let other P2P users into any of your folders and its subfolders. You could inadvertently share information on your hard drive — including tax returns, medical records, or other personal documents — along with the files you want to share.



And almost all P2P file-sharing applications will, by default, share the downloads in your "save" or "download" folder — unless you set it not to.

Use security software and keep it and your operating system up-to-date.

Some file sharing programs may install malware that monitors a user's computer use and then sends that data to third parties. Files you download may also hide malware, viruses, or other unwanted content. And when you install a P2P file sharing application, you might be required to install adware that monitors your browsing habits.

Malware and adware can be difficult to detect and remove. Before you use any file-sharing program, get a security program that includes anti-virus and anti-spyware protection from a vendor you know and trust, and make sure that your operating system is up to date. Set your

security software and operating system to be updated regularly. Make sure your security software and firewall are running whenever your computer is connected to the Internet. Delete any software the security program detects that you don't want on your computer. And before you open or play any downloaded files, scan them with your security software to detect malware or viruses.

Close your connection.

In some instances, closing the file-sharing program window does not actually close your connection to the network. That allows file sharing to continue and could increase your security risk. If you have a high-speed or "broadband" connection to the Internet, you stay connected to the Internet unless you turn off the computer or disconnect your Internet service. These "always on" connections may allow others to copy



your shared files at any time. To be sure your file-sharing program is closed, take the time to exit the program. What's more, some file-sharing programs automatically open every time you turn on your computer. As a preventive measure, you may want to adjust the file-sharing program's controls to stop the file-sharing program from automatically opening.

Create separate user accounts.

If more than one person uses your computer, consider setting up separate user accounts in addition to the administrator's account, and give those user accounts only limited rights. Because only a user with administrator rights can

install software, this can help protect against software you don't want on your computer. It also can keep users from accessing other users' folders and sub-folders because users with limited rights generally don't have access to each other's information. Use a password to protect your firewall and security software so no one else can disable them or grant themselves rights that you don't want them to have.

Back up sensitive documents.

Back up files that you'd want to keep if your computer crashes. Store them on CDs, DVDs, or detachable drives that you keep in a safe place.

Talk with your family about file sharing.

If you're a parent, ask your children whether they've downloaded file-sharing software, and if they've exchanged games, videos, music, or other material. Talk to your kids about the security and other risks involved with file sharing and how to install the software correctly. ★

The information in this article was adapted from *P2P File-Sharing: Evaluate the Risks*, a consumer publication of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission. To obtain a free copy of *P2P File-Sharing*, visit onguardonline.gov and click on "Topics"; call (877)382-4357; or write to Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., H-130, Washington, D.C. 20580.



You already have a complete digital dictation system in your pocket.

SpeakWrite is now available on iPhone and Blackberry

- Turn your phone into a digital office with our US based transcriptionists
- You can record dictation of any length from anywhere with full editing capabilities
- You can record telephone calls, meetings or interviews for transcription
- Or take photos and integrate those into your dictation
- And with our 24/7 transcription staff, your completed work is delivered to your email and your mobile device in about 3 hours
- The App is free; you simply pay for the work transcribed and nothing else

(800) 828-3889

www.speakwrite.com/TXBJ

SPEAKWRITE
Voice-To-Document Service