

Title:

How to Keep Your Laptop Out of Thieves' Hands

Word Count:

844

Summary:

Here are six guidelines to help you avoid seeing your notebook PC disappear!

Keywords:

Small Business Start Up, Small Business Ideas, Small Business Plans

Article Body:

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So there you are, rushing to catch a plane. You've got an important presentation on your laptop, along with sensitive company and personal information. And then, suddenly, it's gone.

Either you've lost it, or it's been stolen.

Airports and hotels are favourite places for thieves. Laptops disappear from both and that's bad enough. But often, irreplaceable data has gone with them. According to Safeware, an insurance agency specialising in insuring high-tech equipment, in the US alone 591,000 laptops vanished in 2001.

None of this has to happen to you. But you have to be extra careful today. With the increased security at airports, losing track of a laptop is easier than ever. Here are six guidelines to help you avoid seeing your notebook PC disappear – or, if it does, help you find it or get a quick replacement.

Tips for Getting Through Security Checks

Oddly, some airports have collected stacks of laptops. They're left behind by harried passengers in security areas. Most are reclaimed eventually. But some people never come back for their machines.

Obviously, you've got to allow yourself plenty of time when you fly. When I travel, I carry my laptop in a backpack. There's lots of room in there, and it's inconspicuous. I see fashionable businesspeople carrying laptops in expensive cases. They're asking for trouble. Those cases say, "Laptop! Laptop! Steal me!"

Security people most likely will want to check the laptop. If possible, handle it yourself, rather than having them do it.

Don't be afraid to speak up. You don't need your machine damaged.

<p>Be sure your battery is charged. The security people may well want to turn on the machine. Most important, don't let it out of your sight. This becomes especially difficult if you are selected for a random head-to-toe check. </p>

<p>Once on board your flight, put the computer – safely stowed in your bag – under the seat in front of you. Try to avoid putting it in the overhead bin. Others will have more access to it there. </p>

Have Sensitive Data? Encrypt It

<p>If you have sensitive information on your computer, consider encrypting it. If you have Windows XP, you already have the tools needed. While the thief has your machine, these extra steps will make it much more difficult to access the laptop's data. </p>

<p>Encryption will protect your business secrets, but it won't retrieve your data. To do that, you've got to back up your information to another computer. If you run your own server, you can easily upload files to it. </p>

<p>You don't have to back up everything on the laptop. Just copy the files you will need to the server. If your laptop should be stolen on your trip, you may be able to borrow a computer at your destination and download your important files. Finding time for backups is a pain, I know. But they can save you. </p>

Make Your MP3 Player do Double-Duty

<p>If you don't have a server, or don't want to back up to it, take a look at MP3 players. Some today have huge hard drives. They are easily hooked to a laptop through the USB or FireWire ports. The data can then be copied to the MP3 player. These things can copy any data, not just MP3s. </p>

Trace a Stolen Laptop's Location

<p>If your laptop does get stolen, wouldn't it be great if the system could do the high-tech equivalent of phoning home? There are programs that will report the location of a stolen laptop. They work when the laptop connects to the internet. </p>

<p>Security experts also say that engraving your name on the computer is helpful. That will make it more difficult to sell on so thieves may look elsewhere. </p>

Set a System Password

<p>Every road warrior should protect their laptop with a start-up password. This way, a system password prompt will appear each time you start your computer before Windows even begins to load. It will prohibit any access to the computer at all. </p>

<p>To create a system password, you'll need to access your computer's setup utility (also known as BIOS settings, which stands for "Basic Input/Output System"). Typically you do this by pressing Delete, Esc or F1 as soon as you turn on the computer. Check the manual though, as some computers are different. </p>

Consider Laptop PC Insurance

<p>If your laptop is expensive (and aren't they all?) you might want to insure it. Some homeowners, renters and business insurance policies don't cover computers, and if they do, there may be many conditions attached. </p>

<p>Today's laptops are ripe targets for thieves. If you follow these basic guidelines along with some good common sense, you won't have to give yours up. </p>