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Thinking Ahead to Prevent Laptop Theft

Adapted From: [Laptops for Dummies](#)

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Any law enforcement official can tell you that a few extra steps of caution can avoid a disastrous theft. Thieves enjoy convenience just as any shopper does; if your laptop is more difficult to pinch than the next guy's, it's the next guy who loses.

Mark your laptop

Marking your laptop helps with the recovery of a stolen (or lost) laptop. Either engrave your information onto your laptop or use a tamper-resistant asset tag. After all, the best proof that something is yours is your name right there on the stolen item.

You can use an engraving tool to literally carve your name and contact information on your laptop.

Some clever folks merely write their names inside the laptop, either on the back of some removable door, inside the battery compartment, or other places a thief probably wouldn't think to check. Use a Sharpie or other indelible marker.

You can get asset tags from most print shops. The tags peel and stick like any sticker, but you can't easily remove or damage them.

Don't use an obvious laptop carrying case

That carrying case with the emblazoned Dell logo (or IBM logo, or what have you) isn't just a proud buyer appreciation/marketing gimmick. The custom laptop case tells the casual thief that something valuable lurks inside.

In contrast to a loud-and-proud custom laptop case, a non-descript, soft laptop case doesn't draw undue attention to your computer. Backpacks also make good places to store laptops.

Register the laptop and its software

Be sure to send in your laptop's registration card, as well as the registration for any software that you use. If someone steals the laptop, alert the manufacturer and software vendors. Hopefully, they care enough so that if someone using your stolen laptop ever tries to get the system fixed or upgraded, your registration information helps you locate the purloined laptop.

This trick assumes that the person fencing the laptop doesn't fully erase the hard drive.



Be sure to keep a copy of the laptop's serial number and other vital statistics with you, specifically in a place other than the laptop's carrying case. That way, you know which number to report to the police, as well as the manufacturer.

Be mindful of your environment

When you're out and about with your laptop, stay aware of where your computer is and who may have access to it. Watch your laptop!

For example, when dining out, put the laptop in its case beneath the table. If you need to leave the table, either take the laptop with you or ask your friends to keep an eye on it for you.



Be especially mindful of distractions! A commotion in front of you means that the thief about to take your laptop is behind you. A commotion behind you means the thief is in front of you. Thieves work in pairs or groups that way, using the commotion to distract you while they steal your stuff.

The old ball and chain

Your laptop probably comes with a hole or slot into which you can connect a security cable. That hole has an official name - the *Universal Security Slot* (or USS).

The USS is designed to be part of the laptop's case. A thief can't remove from the laptop any cable or security device that you thread through the USS; he or she can only cut (or unlock) the cable itself to free the laptop.

Obviously, the USS works best when you have the laptop in a stationery place. Like a bicycle lock, you have to park the laptop by something big and stable, then thread the cable through that big thing and the USS for the lock to work.

The best place to find a security cable for your laptop is in a computer or office supply store.

Some cables come with alarms. You can find alarms that sound when someone cuts the cable, plus alarms that sound when anyone moves the laptop.

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