

Laptop Security



A minor distraction is all it takes for a laptop to vanish. If it goes missing, all the valuable information stored on it may fall into the hands of an identity thief. Keep these tips in mind when you're out and about with your laptop:

The Dos

Treat your laptop like cash. If you had a wad of money sitting out in a public place, would you turn your back on it - even for just a minute? Would you put it in checked luggage? Leave it on the backseat of your car? Of course not. Keep the same watchful eye on your laptop as you would on your cash.

Lock your laptop with a security cable. In the office, a hotel, or some other public place, use a laptop security cable. Attach it to something immovable or to a heavy piece of furniture - say, a table or a desk.

Be on guard in airports and hotels. Keep your eye on your laptop as you go through airport security. Hold onto it until the person in front of you has gone through the metal detector - and keep an eye out when it emerges on the other side. The confusion and shuffle of security checkpoints can be fertile ground for theft.

If you stay in hotels, a security cable may not be enough. Store your laptop in the safe in your room. If you leave your laptop attached to a security cable in your hotel room, consider hanging the "do not disturb" sign on your door.

Consider an alarm. Depending on your security needs, an alarm on your laptop can be a useful tool. Some laptop alarms sound when there's unexpected motion, or when the computer moves outside a specified range. A program that reports the location of your stolen laptop once it's connected to the internet also can be useful.

Consider carrying your laptop in something else less obvious than a laptop case.

When you take your laptop on the road, carrying it in a computer case may advertise what's inside. Consider using a suitcase, a padded briefcase, or a backpack instead.

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The Don'ts

Don't leave it - even for just a minute. Your conference colleagues seem trustworthy, so you're comfortable leaving your laptop while you network during a break. The people at the coffee shop seem nice, so you ask them to keep an eye on it while you use the restroom. Not a good idea. Don't leave your laptop unguarded - even for a minute. Take it with you if you can, or at least use a cable to secure it to something heavy.

Don't leave your laptop in a car. Parked cars are a favorite target of laptop thieves. If you have no choice and you must leave it in your car, keep it locked up and out of sight.

Don't put your laptop on the floor. No matter where you are in public - at a conference, a coffee shop, or a registration desk - don't put your laptop on the floor. If you must put it down, place it between your feet or up against your leg so you remember that it's there.

Don't keep passwords with your laptop or in its case. Remembering strong passwords or access numbers can be a challenge. However, leaving them in your laptop carrying case or on your laptop is like leaving your keys in your car. Don't make it easy for a thief to get to your personal or corporate information.

Where to Report a Stolen Laptop

If your laptop is stolen, report it immediately to the local authorities.

- If it's your personal laptop and your information might be misused by an identity thief, visit ftc.gov/idtheft.
- If it's a business laptop, immediately notify your employer, as well. You may want to review the FTC's information about data breaches.