

## ***To Catch a Thief -- Tips and Tools to Protect Your Computer Investment***

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A recent *New York Times* [article](#) discussed how [Back to My Mac](#) was used to help apprehend two burglary suspects after an Apple employee's laptop was stolen. The owner used Back to My Mac, a subscription service, to access her own computer remotely and used the built-in camera to take a picture of the suspects. Her roommate recognized the computer users, and the police made an arrest.

Back to My Mac wasn't designed to be an anti-theft device, but applications known as Remote Laptop Security exist specifically to aid in the recovery of stolen laptops. Computrace's [LoJack for Laptops](#) is one example. The [CyberAngel](#) is another. [GadgetTrak](#) provides anti-theft protection for both PC and Macintosh laptops as well as mobile devices like cell phones. Most RLS applications require the stolen equipment to connect to the Internet in order to be tracked; however [BackStopp](#) can track a laptop computer using GSM (Global System for Mobile Computing) or RFID (Radio-frequency identification) technology and delete pre-selected files as soon as the stolen laptop is turned on. If there's a built in camera, BackStopp will also take a picture of the user.

Another deterrent, the [STOP Security Plate](#) places a plate with a unique barcode on the surface of a computer. If removed, the plate leaves an indelible message on the surface of the computer informing the world that it is stolen merchandise. At the very least engrave a contact name and phone number onto the laptop, so that it can be returned if found.

The best way to safeguard your laptop is to ensure it does not get stolen in the first place. Invest in one or more of the preventative measures now available. Though more difficult to steal, placing a laptop computer in a docking station does not offer a true theft deterrent. More effective are security cables with keyed or combination locks by companies like [Kensington](#) or [PC Guardian](#). Additionally, the [Targus](#) Security Anchor Base Plate is designed to work with the cables, attaching to a desk or other furniture to further secure your notebook computer. Cables and docking stations will only slow down a determined thief. If possible keep laptops locked in an office or safe when not being used.

Think about what you are using to carry your laptop. A standard laptop case is an invitation to theft; thankfully there are tons of cool ways to transport your laptop while keeping thieves unaware. Many messenger bags include a padded laptop sleeve and backpacks with laptop storage are a nice alternative to the standard laptop case. [Ogio](#) offers an attractive selection of these that are appropriate for both men and women. Appropriately named [eBags](#) provides a handy laptop bag finder search tool and presents a number of options from which to choose.

If your laptop falls into the wrong hands, make it tough for an unauthorized user to gain access to your laptop's content. Power on passwords with a combination of letters, numbers and characters are a great first line of defense. In "[Power Passwords](#)," author Dennis Kennedy advocates pass phrases—a password consisting of an easily remembered but hard to guess sentence or verse containing letters, characters and numbers. Use the free online [Password Strength Checker](#) to test out your pass phrase.

Data encryption scrambles your data thus making it impossible to read without the key and should be standard procedure for mobile computing users. [LaptopLock](#) is freeware that protects data by encryption. After a number of failed access attempts it will delete files and/or hide them from unauthorized users. [FYI: Playing it Safe with Encryption](#) provides additional data encryption options.

Laptop theft is big business. A *Consumer Reports* employee and blogger recently posted his own [experience](#) with skilled laptop thieves in Brussels, Belgium. This ABC News [article](#) also discusses the trend. LTRC further addresses mobile security in the article [FYI: Security on the Go](#).

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