

Track thousands of Web sites in one place: [Newsburst](#)

Security >> Policy, law, & crime

NSA granted Net location-tracking patent

Published: September 21, 2005, 1:49 PM PDT

By [Declan McCullagh](#)
Staff Writer, CNET News.com



The National Security Agency has obtained a patent on a method of figuring out an Internet user's geographic location.

Patent [6,947,978](#), granted Tuesday, describes a way to discover someone's physical location by comparing it to a "map" of Internet addresses with known locations.

The NSA did not respond Wednesday to an interview request, and the patent description talks only generally about the technology's potential uses. It says the geographic location of Internet users could be used to "measure the effectiveness of advertising across geographic regions" or flag a password that "could be noted or disabled if not used from or near the appropriate location."

Other applications of the [geo-location](#) patent, invented by Stephen Huffman and Michael Reifer of Maryland, could relate to the NSA's [signals intelligence mission](#)--which is, bluntly put, spying on the communications of non-U.S. citizens.

"If someone's engaged in a dialogue or frequenting a 'bad' Web site, the NSA might want

advertisement

SONY **VAIO** PROFESSIONAL

Free* 30-day trial of the Cingular® National EDGE Network

Taxes and other charges apply. Click here for complete offer details, price plans, service terms and conditions and coverage map.

Policy, law, & crime resource center from News.com sponsors

The Next Threat Is No Threat With Trend Micro

Trend Micro: Antivirus Leader Tackles Spyware with a Unique Multilayered Approach
Read the Free White Paper>>

Trend Micro OfficeScan Anti-Spyware Suite: a security solution that protects your computers from multiple attacks.

to know where they are," said **Mike Liebholt**, a senior researcher at the **Institute for the Future** who has studied geo-location technology. "It wouldn't give them precision, but it would give them a clue that they could use to narrow down the location with other intelligence methods."

The NSA's patent relies on measuring the latency, meaning the time lag between computers exchanging data, of "numerous" locations on the Internet and building a "network latency topology map." Then, at least in theory, the Internet address to be identified can be looked up on the map by measuring how long it takes known computers to connect to the unknown one.

The technique isn't foolproof. People using a dial-up connection can't be traced beyond their Internet service provider--which could be in a different area of the country--and it doesn't account for proxy services like **Anonymizer**.



Geo-location, sometimes called "geo-targeting" when used to deliver advertising, is an increasingly attractive area for Internet businesses. DoubleClick has **licensed geo-location technology** to deliver location-dependent advertising, and Visa has **signed a deal** to use the concept to identify possible credit card fraud in online orders.

Digital Envoy holds a **patent** on geo-location, and **Quova**, a privately held firm in Mountain View, Calif., holds three more, one shared with Microsoft.

"It's honestly not clear that there's anything special or technically advanced about what they're describing," Quova Vice President Gary Jackson said, referring to the NSA's patent. "I'd have to have our technical guys read it, but I don't think it impacts us in any way."



Track this story's companies and

Get the Free Trial
Download>>

InterScan Web Security Suite provides three levels of protection against Spyware
Free 30-day Trial
Download>>

Expose and eradicate spyware with Trend Micro's Enterprise-class, multi-level, anti-Spyware solution



Today in News.com Extra

Can bloggers strike it rich?
Also: Treo owners sue Palm.

Read all about it >

Top picks from News.com readers

Readers who read **NSA granted Net location-tracking patent** also read....

Google builds an empire to rival Microsoft

Crave privacy? New tech knocks out digital cameras

Did Army project identify Sept. 11 ringleader?

Office 12 makeover takes on 'feature creep'

topics

Internet	Create alert
Security	Create alert
Patents	Create alert
Geographic regions	Create alert
Government	Create alert

[Create your own e-mail alert >](#)

Related stories

[Google loses round against Digital Envoy](#)
May 26, 2005

[Digital Envoy wins geotargeting patent](#)
June 29, 2004

[Can geo-location services find the way?](#)
March 10, 2003

[Quova upgrade pins down AOL users](#)
February 13, 2002

[Geographic tracking raises opportunities, fears](#)
November 8, 2000

[Get this story's "Big Picture" >](#)

From News.com Extra

[Geolocation: Don't Fence Web In](#) from Wired News

[Wi-Fi Makes Ad Sense For Google](#) from InternetNews.com

[Who Is Nearby? Geotagging And Social Interaction](#) from LockerGnome

[Get more news around the Web with News.com Extra >](#)

Popular white papers

[Change Management: The Other Half of the Story](#)

[Active Reasoning](#)

[Critical infrastructure: securing wireless networks \(Webcast\)](#)

[ZDNet](#)

[Wide Area Data Services: Optimizing the Branch](#)

[Symantec: Mozilla browsers more vulnerable than IE](#)
[Microsoft to reorg; Allchin to retire](#)
[Google invites 400 to 'off the record' event](#)
[Sony says new Walkman is an iPod killer](#)
[Apple planning a laptop with a camera latch?](#)

[More Info](#)

THE PULSE Most popular headlines

- [Google builds an empire to rival Microsoft](#)
- [Microsoft gets a makeover](#)
- [NEC launches super-slim flip phone](#)
- [Are we getting smarter or dumber?](#)
- [Office 12 makeover takes on 'feature creep'](#)

Also: Most discussed and e-mailed stories

Latest headlines

- [All eyes on Rita as Katrina aftermath unfolds](#)
- [Microsoft's nightmare inches closer to reality](#)
- [Attack code published for Firefox flaw](#)
- [Credit bureaus to adopt data protection standard](#)
- [Move over Google Sidebar](#)
- [IBM launches online college recruiting effort](#)
- [Quarterly profit rises for Oracle](#)
- [Demofall's emerging-tech carnival](#)
- [Viacom may have its eye on iFilm](#)
- [Palm's profits fall despite Treo sales](#)
- [Pamela Anderson tops a decade of Web search](#)

Riverbed

[An Introduction to MPLS](#)

Converge! Media Ventures

[Macromedia's Flash Platform: Bringing Rich Experiences to the Masses](#)

Macromedia

[TCP/IP Fundamentals for Microsoft Windows](#)

Microsoft

[More White Papers >](#)

Related videos



[Citizens, businesses to interact with city in real-time, anytime](#)
September 16, 2005



[E-mail authentication is a "first step"](#)
September 14, 2005



[Dyson discusses importance of peer-to-peer system](#)
September 14, 2005

[Watch more videos >](#)

TalkBack

Post a comment

Click on a comment to explore replies (9 total replies - **3 NEW**)

[Why tip their hand?](#) Richard Kokoska -- Sep 21

[They patented this?](#) Marcus Westrup -- Sep 21

[This was done years ago, ...for fun, ...by students...](#) Gayle

Edwards -- Sep 21

[who you gonna call?](#) J O0o -- Sep 22

- Symantec buys antiphishing firm WholeSecurity
- Cingular to launch music download service in 2006
- Toyota: Hybrid demand up in Katrina's wake
- Katrina spurs federal action on VoIP

Latest Photo Galleries

- Images: 'Potentially catastrophic' Rita looms
- Photos: Dell's answer to the iPod Shuffle
- Photo: Nokia's phone for emerging markets

Today in **NEWS.BLOG**

Media: AOL gets its groove back

Cellular: Free 411 for the mobile masses

Gadgets: A one-stop digital-media shop

Oracle: Life's a beach for Larry Ellison

Search: Ask Jeeves' butler to get the boot

[Read all News.com's tech blogs](#)

▶ [This week's headlines](#)

▼ advertisement

Superworms
Click to see the whiteboard video

Sponsored Links

BS7799 Management System

Solution for policies, procedures awareness, education, templates.
www.neupart.com

Need Security Policies?

1300 pre-written security policies by Charles Cresson Wood, CISA CISM
www.informationshield.com

CISA Certification

Be a CISA. Be in demand. Register for the December CISA Exam
www.isaca.org



CNET NEWSLETTERS

CLICK ON A TITLE BELOW TO LEARN MORE:

[News.com Morning](#)

[Dispatch](#) sample

[News.com Afternoon](#)

[Dispatch](#) sample

[News.com Enterprise](#)

[Hardware](#) sample

[All News.com newsletters](#)

SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR PARTNERS
CLICK ON A TITLE BELOW TO LEARN MORE ABOUT IT.

[Surveys](#)

[IT Professionals](#)

[IT Management](#)

[Small Business Owners](#)

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

[Manage My Newsletters](#)

[How to advertise](#) | [Send us news tips](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Corrections](#) | [All RSS feeds](#) | [XML](#) | [News.com Extra](#)
[Site map](#) | [Linking policy](#) | [Content licensing](#) | [News.com mobile](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [E-mail alerts](#)

Featured services: [BNET: Business White Papers](#) | [Find tech jobs](#) | [Digital Living](#) | [Free mag. trial](#) | [Industry White Papers](#)

[BNET](#) | [CNET.com](#) | [CNET Channel](#) | [CNET Download.com](#) | [CNET News.com](#) | [CNET Reviews](#) | [CNET Shopper.com](#) | [Computer Shopper](#)

[GameSpot](#) | [International Media](#) | [MP3.com](#) | [mySimon](#) | [Release 1.0](#) | [Search.com](#) | [TechRepublic](#) | [TV.com](#) | [Webshots](#) | [ZDNet](#)

Copyright ©2005 CNET Networks, Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

[About CNET Networks](#) | [Jobs](#)