

Net experts are now being hired to monitor the online activities of husbands, wives and lovers “It’s as simple as sending an email to the one under surveillance. Once the receiver opens the email, monitoring is set into action.”

It seems the stakes have just got higher for private detectives in the city. Catering to the high-tech requirements of well-to-do individuals, who need to spy on their spouses, the detectives are now being employed to hack into the social networking profiles of their better halves to know what’s cooking with them.

Far from the days when a disguise or an ability to conduct covert surveillance could help yield the desired results for their clients, detectives now need to be technically sharp and ‘more than proficient’ in the use of a computer to stay one step ahead of their subjects.

Arul Manimaaran, the MD of Chennai-based Star Detective Bureau of India says, “Nowadays, both partners in a relationship are tech-savvy. The first thing they look out for is the online activities that each of them indulge in. Hacking into a spouse or lover’s Orkut profile is a common thing and it’s happening in Chennai as well. The technology is as simple as sending an email to the one who is under surveillance. Once the receiver opens the email, the monitoring is set into action. The biggest draw is that the detective can remotely monitor the activities from anywhere in the world.” He adds, “There are dedicated Internet experts who help detectives solve such cases where they need to track the emails and chat transcripts of the spouse. These consultants have their own service fees as well which can start anywhere from Rs 5,000 per session and run into several thousands depending on the sessions involved.” And it seems Internet consultants have actually cashed in on a golden opportunity lying in wait. Sunny Waghela, an independent Internet security consultant, who assists the cyber crime cells and crime branch of Ahmedabad police says, “A few months ago, spouses from affluent families from across the country approached me, asking me to track the online activities of their partners.

Using programs like key loggers (which track every key stroke made by a user on the PC), I was successful in cracking many cases. For instance, there was this newly married couple where the husband suspected his wife cheating on him. Using the tracking program, we found that she was chatting with an ex-boyfriend, who was in a live-in relationship with the lady before she got married. I have now stopped assisting in such cases as the volume of requests is extremely high.” But isn’t such infringement tantamount to invasion of privacy? Na Vijayashankar, a nationally known expert on cyber law says, “Ownership of a PC is different from the ownership of personal information space. Which means even if a wife logs onto a social network or any other site using her husband’s PC, the husband has no right to track any kind of information, which is being sent out of or into her profile. The same rule goes for any communication whether it’s an email or an instant messenger chat. The punishment for the same is upto three years of imprisonment, both for the party who instigated the monitoring (the spouse) and those who abetted it (the detective agency and/or the Internet expert), according to Section 66 of the IT Act 2000. Also evidence collected by such illegal means is inadmissible in court.”