

Tip of the Month – March 2011

Are you smarter than your Smart Phone?

Many Bahamians are “high-tech junkies” who must have the latest in smart phone technology. However, little thought is given to the fact that beyond the ability to download the latest games and other online applications, there is the tremendous impact on their personal information that goes along with these inventions.

According to the Privacy Commissioner of Canada “A fully loaded smart phone is like carrying around a tiny little communications satellite bristling with sensors and antennas. It’s constantly sending and receiving data about your activities and your whereabouts.” Do you wonder where the data is going? What it is saying about you? And what is the effect on your privacy?

Worldwide, the popularity of smart phones has surpassed all expectation and they are the fastest growing mobile devices in recent times. More and more applications are being developed to run on smart phones. “These range from quirky quizzes to handy mapping and navigational programs, diet-tracking tools and social networking sites”

Location is Key!

Increasingly, applications are also capitalizing on the capacity of smart phones to reveal their owner’s location. In Canada, for example, one widely used application automatically transmits coupons and other bonuses to the user’s mobile device every time the user patronizes certain establishments.

But just as applications vary in type and quality, so do their privacy and practices. From a technical standpoint, there’s little to stop developers from programming applications in a way that enables them to collect, use or share the personal information of users – and often that of their contacts or networks.

Users may never even know this is happening, and might not approve of the practice if they did. Indeed, the inappropriate collection, use or disclosure of personal information could expose people to surreptitious surveillance, or unwanted targeting by unscrupulous marketers or swindlers.

Smart phones are terrific devices, but it’s up to you to take the necessary steps to protect your personal information.

Here are some tips for smarter smart phone use

Do your due diligence – Before you download a dazzling new application, check it out. Does it tell you what personal information it collects, and how it will use it? If not, do your own research. Many online forums discuss applications and provide authoritative reviews about important matters, including privacy.

Think it through – Downloading an application may be a snap, but take your time and do a cost-benefit analysis first. Your personal information has real value, which is why application developers, marketers and many others want to get their hands on it. But don’t give it away. Trade it for something worthwhile, including a solid assurance that it will be treated with care.

Keep it safe – If you lose your smart phone, a lot of your personal information can fall into the wrong hands. Make sure you always use a strong password to protect your data. If you give, trade or throw away your smart phone, be sure you first follow the manufacturer's directions for thoroughly deleting all the data that was on it.

For more information about this or any other aspect of the Data Protection, please e-mail us at dataprotection@bahamas.gov.bs