

Background

Is your data safer on your phone?

Having a smart phone or a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) should make your life easier. Having the Internet and *access to your emails in your pocket means that anywhere and everywhere is your office. But are there hidden dangers that most of us don't think of when we buy our exciting new smart phone?

Phil Jones is a security *consultant working with clients across Europe and advises his customers not to put too much personal or company information on their *portable devices. 'Research has shown us that palm top computers, PDAs, and smart phones are often used to store personal data – from addresses and bank account details of employees to company records. This can include details of *ongoing negotiations and in one case *unkind comments about other employees. This is dangerous because it means that other people can **get their hands on** this sensitive data quite easily.'

Jones' colleague Giuseppe Contadino suggests there are three main ways that this data can **fall into the wrong hands**. Firstly, these portable devices are usually very small and so are easily lost or stolen, so other people can then access your data. Ten mobile phones or PDAs are **handed in** at Heathrow airport every day. 'You may think that you are protected because you have a username and passwords, but it is surprising how quickly hackers can get around those basic security measures', warns Contadino.

The second way data can be stolen is over the Internet. 'You would never use

your laptop on a public wi-fi network without antivirus software and a good firewall, but a lot of people are connecting to the Internet on their hand-held devices on unsecured networks without similar protection. This means that your computer is open to hackers who can get their hands on everything you send.' Contadino also warns us that virus writers are now writing worms and viruses especially for **hand-held** devices.

Finally there is the question of what to do with the phone when you decide to upgrade. Mobile devices are now rarely used for over eighteen months, but how do you safely *dispose of your smart phone? Two recent studies suggest that mobile devices bought **second hand** on websites like eBay still contain sensitive data belonging to their original owners. There is also a problem with how companies dispose of phones. 'Employees think that someone in the company will make their phones safe when they hand them in, while the company expects the employees to wipe them clean. And it's actually very difficult to completely wipe these new devices clean', explains Contadino.

So what do the experts suggest? Phil Jones gives three pieces of advice. 'If you keep the amount of personal or company data to a minimum then you reduce the risk. Also make sure your hand-held is protected with anti-virus software, and finally if you are not sure, contact a security specialist who can help you make your portable device as safe as possible.'

Glossary

**access* = the opportunity to look at something

**consultant* = someone who advises other people on something

**dispose of* = throw something away; get rid of something

**ongoing negotiations* = business discussions that are still happening

**portable devices* = pieces of equipment that can be carried

**unkind comments* = things that have been said that are not nice

Exercises

1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 Do you own a mobile phone?
- 2 What information do you keep on it?
- 3 Is it a smart phone? If not would you like a smart phone?
- 4 Is using a smart phone safer than using a PC? Why? / Why not?

2 Read the text quickly. Compare your answers to question 4 in 1 to the information in the text.

3 Read the text again and find out why the following words are used in the text.

Example: *pocket: Having the Internet in your pocket may make your life easier.*

- 1 bank account details: _____
- 2 Heathrow: _____
- 3 eBay: _____
- 4 hackers: _____
- 5 eighteen months: _____
- 6 wipe clean: _____

4 The author uses the word *hand* a number of times. Match the phrases in bold in the text to definitions 1–5.

- 1 not new; owned by someone else before: _____
- 2 small enough to be in your hand while being used: _____
- 3 to give something to a person in authority, especially a piece of work or something that has been lost: _____
- 4 when something becomes controlled or owned by somebody who doesn't have permission to do so: _____
- 5 to find or get something: _____

5 Work with a partner. Make a new sentence for each of the phrases in 4.

6 Read the text again and answer these questions in your own words.

- 1 Why should having a smart phone make your life easier?
- 2 What are the three ways that people's data can fall into the wrong hands?
- 3 How can you make your smart phone safer?

7 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

8 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 Do people in your country know about the dangers of keeping data on a phone?
- 2 Would it be easy to follow the experts' advice?
- 3 Is it usual for people in your country to change their mobile phone every eighteen months?
- 4 How often do you change your phone? What are your reasons for changing?