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Smartphone User and Application Safety

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As technology advances, cell phones have become more and more sophisticated. They not only can make phone calls from anywhere, but they can send texts, pictures and videos, and connect to the Internet. The newest advancements in cell phones are smartphones, which are capable of many different functions, including sending and receiving email, playing music, and downloadable applications. With increased capacities in phones, users need to be aware of necessary information and safety measures.

Smartphones

Although many different phones could be classified as a "smartphone," this publication will focus on the Apple iPhone and Android. Users of these phones should take safety precautions for themselves and their children. With so many options, applications, and functions, knowing how to handle this technology safely can be overwhelming.

Applications (Apps)

Applications, also known as apps, are software installed on an electronic device. Most apps are downloaded through the Internet onto smartphones (iPhone or Android), computers, or iPads. Apps in reference to cell phones are specific downloads that assist with a specific task, such as checking current weather conditions. These applications can be downloaded for free or for a cost. They vary in purpose from doing online banking to playing games online.

Application Tips

- Turn off the GPS portion of the app. You still will be able to track the phone's usage through signal towers. Apps will work fine. You may want to keep the GPS activated for apps such as weather forecast (for accurate weather near you), but for apps such as Flickr, you do not need to know where the picture was taken or put online. This is found under "location service" on the IPhone.

- If you do online banking, get the application from your bank because of its stronger security features rather than downloading one from the Internet.

- Large companies often have their own apps that likely are better quality (although not always). Examples are Amazon or PayPal.

- Enforce the rule that you have to approve and/or use any application your son/daughter wants before they can download it.

- If an application is asking for unnecessary personal information, remember to check for another version from another source of the same application.

- Be aware that some applications were created with the intention of gathering your personal information and selling it for marketing purposes. This is more likely with free apps and/or apps for the Android, although not always.

- Before downloading an app, look at its ratings and comments. This may assist you in deciding if an app is safe to download.

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Android Information

- The Android has a greater selection of applications to choose from because of the free market. Applications can be posted or downloaded by anyone (more choices in apps but more risk).

- Shopping app by app is best because of the wide array or apps available.

- An app called Open Advanced Task Killer will close apps if they are still open but you have not used the apps for some time. This protects your phone by decreasing the chance of your phone being hacked.

- When changing security settings, depending on the phone, check under "settings." Within that tab, check "wireless networks" and/or "location and security." This often is where you can change WIFI and GPS settings.

iPhone Information

- All purchases and downloads for the iPhone are through the Apple Store, which means Apple has more control over which applications and downloads are available and their cost. This is good for security because you do not have to enter information at several different sites to download music or applications. The downside is that all your information (including credit card number) is in one place to be hacked.

- Apple's privacy policy states that it will not share personal information to third parties for marketing purposes.

General Phone Safety Tips

- Have the Bluetooth technology turned off unless you use that feature on your phone. If it is on, it is a hacker risk and it drains your battery.

- If possible, have fees for downloads and/or applications charged to your cell phone bill instead of your credit card so you do not need to give out your credit card number to an unknown site. The less information you give out, the better.

- Keep your phone current with updates because these often have security updates in them. Apple will make you do this every time you plug the phone into the computer but Androids do not. You often have to seek the updates for Androids and/or you may have to pay extra to have your phone updated, depending on your phone contract.

- Put a password on your phone so others cannot access information directly from the phone.

- If possible, register your phone or download an "if found" application in case your phone is lost or stolen so it might be located and retrieved.

- Utilize parental controls through your cell phone company provider. Apple also has controls in the Apple Store, where download purchases can be regulated and controlled.

- Know the limits of your data plan (if you have one). Going over your download limit will be expensive. Especially discuss this with teenagers who have cell phones because they may not realize how many gigabytes of information they are downloading.

- If possible, set your WIFI to manual control so that your phone does not automatically connect to public connections (such as coffee shops) because public domains increase the chances of your phone (or computer) being hacked.

Some Ideas

- Help your teen develop a budget for apps or save for them.
- Take time to look at apps on your teen's phone.

References

Bertsch, R. Personal communications Sept.14, 2011.

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For more information on this and other topics, see www.ag.ndsu.edu