Mobile Generation's White Hat Hackers: The Eight Best Ways to Protect Smart Phones

NEW YORK, /PRNewswire/ -- Have you ever received repeated cell phone calls from an unknown number? Or opened a text message offering an update to a phone app you don't even use? These are just a few of the situations that should raise security red flags, according to computer science and information technology students at the prestigious Information Systems and Internet Security (ISIS) Lab at the Polytechnic Institute of New York University.

As part of Cyber Security Awareness Month in October, the students offer tips on how they keep their own personal information safe and dodge traps set by clever hackers.

The students, a mix of undergraduate, graduate and doctoral candidates, are the masterminds behind Cyber Security Awareness Week (CSAW), the most comprehensive set of challenges for elite computer science students.

On October 29, more than 300 finalists from across the continental United States will compete for prizes and scholarships on the NYU-Poly Brooklyn campus by solving the kinds of simulated security crises likely to emerge in an increasingly wired world.

The young white hat hackers – so named because they will graduate to protect institutions from the bad, black-hatted hackers' cyber incursions – offer the following advice for keeping cell phones and smart phones safe:

When using social networking sites from your phone, skip the native apps – which know far more about your life than web browsers ever could – and access the sites through your phone's browser. Also, use a password-protected screen lock to keep your phone secure.

Julian Cohen Sophomore – Computer Science

Beware the false "update" link for apps! Verify the link you're using to download an app before you click on it, or go directly to the company's site to download the update. Sending fraudulent "update" links is a common method for directing users to sites where personal information can be compromised.

Luis E. Garcia II Graduate Student – Computer Science

Clean up your apps regularly, removing those you don't use. Some apps may be able to monitor and access various types of data on your phone, including your contact list. And if your phone has a SIM card, set a PIN code for the card - if the phone is ever lost, nobody can use the card.

Efstratios Gavas, Doctoral Candidate – Computer Science

Read the reviews of apps before you download, and choose reputable apps. Apps without many reviews and those that have been recently uploaded to the app market or app store are more likely to contain privacy and security problems.

Michael J. Harris, Graduate Student – Computer Science

Don't trust Bluetooth! If you use a hands-free device to make cell phone calls, always use a wired headset. Bluetooth devices can be compromised and your personal data can be accessed or corrupted. If you do use Bluetooth, protect the connection with a longer, more secure password instead of a short PIN.

Liyun Li, Doctoral Candidate – Computer Science

Watch out for apps that ask for too many permissions – if you're installing a calculator app and it requests Internet and contacts permissions, that's a bad sign. One way cyberthieves exploit smart phones is by creating a good app with some extra code and overreaching permissions.

Sankar Ponnusamy, Master's – Management Science Log out of all web services every time you're finishing using them, or you may stay logged in indefinitely – even to sensitive sites like banking and email. On desktops, there's a timeout period if you remain inactive, but not always with mobile access. If the phone is lost, anyone can access the sites you're logged into.

Jeyavijayan Rajendran, Graduate Student – Electrical and Computer Engineering

Think twice before answering calls or text messages from unknown numbers, especially if you've received a call more than once. Phishing scams are often initiated through cell phone calls or texts. Google the phone number that's calling you, and see if anyone has reported it as linked to a scam.

Sen Yang, Graduate Student – Computer Science

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