

## **Dealing with the Stolen Smartphone Epidemic**

Hal Steger

According to the FCC, stolen cell phones make up approximately 40 percent of thefts in major American cities. Moreover, according to data from industry analysts IDC and the New York Times, about half of the robberies in San Francisco in 2012 involved cell phones, as did 42 percent in DC and 14 percent in New York. Industry observers have noted that certain companies in the mobile industry, such as device makers and operators, have a vested interest in not doing more technically to immobilize stolen phones.

There is, however, something that users can do to protect themselves, right now, against a stolen (or lost or broken) device. They can use a free personal cloud service to safeguard valued mobile data and content.

A personal cloud service will not help with the direct financial loss of replacing a device, nor will most protect privacy by deleting information on a device, although some perform “lock and wipe,” which enables data to be remotely erased in case a phone is lost or stolen. The issue with “lock and wipe” is that there is generally a way for knowledgeable people to prevent it from working or the damage could be done before the user has a chance to wipe the device, so it is not a 100% reliable approach.

The point is, sooner or later, there's a good chance a smartphone or tablet will be stolen, lost or broken. Even if one is careful. The question becomes what to do when it happens.

As we rely on smartphones and tablets more, they contain more valuable information, including contacts, text messages, pictures, apps and other sensitive information. It is bad enough to lose this and to be worried about a stranger accessing one's personal data, so why not make sure your important stuff is at least securely backed up in your own cloud? Isn't it worth a few moments of your time for peace of mind? Especially when doing this is easy and free? It's like getting a free insurance policy for one's phone information. Not only that, but when the replacement device arrives, all or most of the old information can be restored, eliminating the need to re-enter information or call around frantically trying to get bits and pieces from others.

There are several free personal cloud services that store and sync content to an individual cloud.

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These services range in storage size, type of data stored and other capabilities, therefore, it is important to compare them. Considerations should include privacy, security and reliability. Users should also consider if a specific cloud works across different vendor devices that they may use, the types of data and content supported, and whether the user is locked-in or forced to buy content from a provider. In the end, it is important to protect one's phone and data because as much of a lifeline that a phone is to a user, it's also a treasure chest for criminals specializing in identity theft, reselling stolen phones or using phones for their own miscreant purposes.

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