

Geotagged Pictures Could Turn You into a Crime Victim

January 20, 2011 - The chances are that you have a cell phone with a camera in it. You may be like me. I almost never post my own pictures to the internet. On the other hand, you may be one of the millions of people who love to share their pictures on websites like Facebook or Twitter. If that sounds like you, there is a good chance that the pictures you are taking contain a lot more information than you may have thought. And if that information falls into the rightâ€” or rather, the wrong hands, you could be setting yourself up to become a robbery victim or even worse.

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(function() {  
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];  
s.type = 'text/javascript';  
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';  
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);  
})();
```

Most people who use their cell phone cameras are not aware of the fact that these cameras embed a lot of information in each picture. If your cell phone has GPS capability - virtually all smart phones do - one of the bits of information contained in the picture is the actual location that it was taken. This is called a "geotag". If you post that picture to the internet, that information is available to anyone who knows what they're doing. And there are plenty of criminals who know exactly what they are doing.

There are several types of crime that can occur because of these tags. First, if you take pictures at your home and then post them, anyone looking at those pictures can easily find out exactly where you live. If there is a stalker out there looking for someone just like you, that could put you right in their crosshairs.

The most common form of crime that is believed to occur because of geotags is currently burglary. You may think that this is odd but let's just say you take a picture of that brand new stereo you just purchased and post it to the internet. You let a few days go by and you post another picture from a location 75 miles away from your home. A criminal looking at your latest picture posting will have good reason to believe that you are not home when you post that picture and you won't be home for at least the next hour. That's plenty of time to break in to your house, steal the stereo and any other valuables you have, and make an escape.

Of course, if you post that picture from 75 miles away after you return home, you could make the criminals believe you are gone when you are really there. If the criminal breaks in while you are actually home, all sorts of bad things can happen.

Fortunately, most cell phones allow you to turn off geotagging. If you want to protect your privacy and enhance your security, that is probably a very good idea.

by Jim Malmberg

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