

Apple About to Throw Its Customers Privacy Under the Bus

August 6, 2021 - Apple has built much of its corporate reputation on protecting its users. The company won't allow its iPhone customers to install software from third party sources because, according to them, that could open the phones up to hacking, privacy invasions, viruses and a litany of other excuses. And they have refused to work with law enforcement to provide access to encrypted devices used in criminal activity, even when a search warrant has been issued. After all, the company has a privacy reputation to maintain. So it may come as a surprise to you to learn that Apple is about to start scanning its customers pictures for prohibited content. What could possibly go wrong with that?

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var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
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s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
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})();
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(function() {
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po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
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This might just be one of those cases where the road to perdition is paved with good intentions. But given the big-tech behavior of the past couple of years, we don't think so.

What Apple is about to do is start scanning pictures taken by users of the company's products. They're supposedly looking for child abuse and child pornography. The excuse they are using is that they already have to do this on their cloud storage, so this new arrangement will just short-cut that process and save them the trouble of scanning the data later.

It's a lame excuse. There are so many privacy issues with this plan that it would probably be impossible to name them all, so we'll give you just a few items to ponder.

First, if they can start scanning your pictures for content they don't think you should have then what's to keep them from scanning everything else on your phone. If you use your phone for business and have confidential information on it, then you probably don't want that info in the hands of another company or individual. Or if your doctor uses an iPhone and uses it to review your medical records, what's to keep the company from reviewing those records too. The company is granting themselves access to just about anything you can imagine being stored on an Apple device.

Taking things a step further, let's say that the company's political positions differ from your own. Over the past two years, we've all seen big tech take down the accounts of people that they disagree with, including the account of a then-sitting President of the United States. It isn't hard to imagine that the company might scan your files and determine that certain opinions of yours didn't quite live up to their standards. Could they make your phone inoperable? Could they disable certain features or apps? Could they share that information with others? And more importantly than anything else, would they?

There's really no way to tell at this point but big-tech doesn't have a very good track record in this area.

And finally, Apple has repeatedly told federal and state law enforcement agencies that it won't help them break into the devices that they make, and that they won't engineer in back-doors that could give law enforcement access to those devices if they are seized. The reason is that as soon as a back-door is present, it presents a security threat to the user. But now the company is going to place a back-door into all of its operating systems and use it for its own purposes! Let that sink in. Either the statements that they have made to law enforcement agencies were a lie, or they're blanketing themselves in hypocrisy.

There is no other way to put it. This is either a really, really bad idea. The minute that Apple launches this, all of their "superior security" claims fly out the window. They are probably opening themselves up to legal challenges from both consumers and the government. The idea that a company can decide what you can and can't have on a phone that you own is completely preposterous. The prospect of them rigorously enforcing that that decision by scanning what's on your personal phone is simply frightening.

If you own an Apple device, it is time to run for the exits.

by Jim Malmberg

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