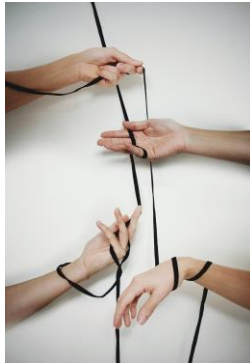


## Privacy: The Unplugged Phone

Now there's proof your phone is spying on you. Here's the TL;DR: **“Each Google or Apple phone has a 32-digit advertising ID. We did a side-by-side test between our phone and Google and apples and the Google and Apple phone seem to wake up between 2:00 and 3:00 at night and they have this huge, like a 50 MB data dump, that is sent out for the phone every night, by the phone. Basically that phone is phoning home. Sending off your preferences, everything you've done that day.”**

As I was perusing Instagram at night, I ran across a reel (a short, 1 to 3 minute long video that Instagram is using to compete against TikTok) from the Shawn Ryan Podcast Show (#123) about the Unplugged phone. It's supposed to be secure, encrypted, free from viruses, and “unhackable.” Well, sign me up!



Does it really live up to these marketing claims? According to Erik Prince, the founder of Unplugged, “Having seen the abuses of law enforcement and politicized government organs, ... for all this nonsense, I said we gotta have our own phone, independent of the Google and Apple universe. We had a team together already that had done a lot of offense and defensive cyber around phones including building a completely separate operating system for a secure phone and even one that controls pacemakers” (The Shawn Ryan Show #123).

Prince went on to say, “We've done all the third party penetration testing. Are there back doors and all the rest? We've put out huge bounties at the defcon hacker conference to say this is our messenger and our operating system. If you can hack it, there's Bitcoin wallets in these places. If you can hack it, great. Nobody's hacked it. We still have the Bitcoin, and it's worth more now.”

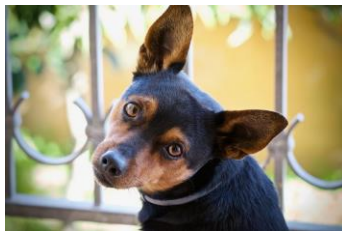


Image by [Luisella Planeta LOVE PEACE](#) from [Pixabay](#)

OK, so now I'm listening more closely. I hadn't heard about this phone, but he certainly piqued my interest. A phone that works seamlessly with current Big Tech (Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and others) but doesn't have viruses and has a secure messaging and operating system that doesn't answer to those companies? That's a bold claim. I looked for other sources that had information about the Unplugged phone, and found an article written by Patrick O'Neill for the MIT Technology Review (2022). He mentions, “For example, the security firm DarkMatter, an incognito intelligence agency for the United Arab Emirates that has reportedly been busted hacking dissidents and

journalists, marketed its own “ultrasecure” phone called the Katim beginning in 2018. The same year, **a sleek black phone dubbed Anom was marketed specifically to people involved in organized crime, promising an “ultrasecure” device “hardened against targeted surveillance and intrusion.”** In fact, however, the **phone company was secretly run by the FBI.**”

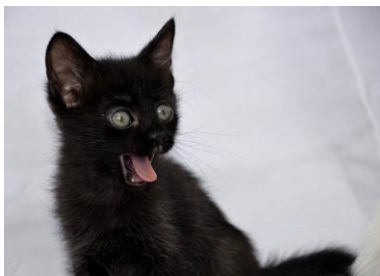
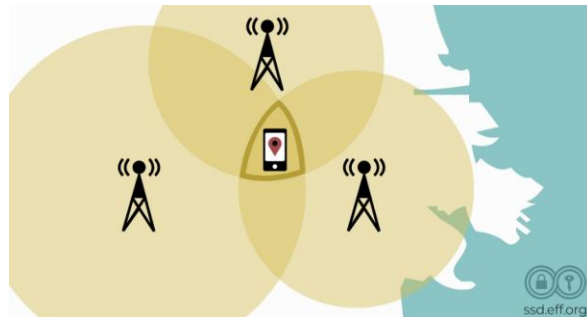


Image by [raffaella ceruti](#) from [Pixabay](#)

O’Neill goes on to say, “The product is the latest example in a decade-long tradition of privacy- and security-focused smartphones that promise to do far more than your Android or iPhone can to protect you and your data. Ever since Edward Snowden’s 2013 revelations about American spying, a new phone has popped up in this market at least once per year.” And this is not a bad thing, but cellular phones are just that. Cell. Phones.

In order for any device to work on the Internet (and especially cellular phones), it must “ping” towers (or servers, in the case of wired connections) in the geographic area - and then it connects to the one giving off the strongest signal. Of course, for anyone who has done any navigation, we know that using two fixed points allows us to find our current location. That’s basic geometry. So a phone that pings two or more towers can be located (watch almost any police procedural, like NCIS).



<https://ssd.eff.org/module/mobile-phones-location-tracking>

Alright, so Mr. O’Neill has a point about being able to be tracked. Also, I really like using GPS (I was the stereotypical Butter Bar in the Army, if you know you know) so I’m not that concerned about sharing my location. What about other privacy concerns? The MIT review doesn’t have a lot to say about them. Mainly, what **Prince said here regarding what local sheriff offices have to track regular people: “...whether it’s Stingray stuff, ad IDs, all this stuff, it’s all based on the exhaust given off by your Google or Android type phone.... Each Google or Apple phone has a 32-digit advertising ID. It’s a code that follows that device around everywhere and that’s how the tech companies track where that device goes to figure out proximity for advertising sales and who you’re interacting with and your schedule.** The average kid in America, by the time they reach the age of 13, has had 72 million data points collected on them by big tech.”

AH HA! So your phone is **definitely** listening in to what you’re doing, saying, and going. Yikes.

With the rise of fingerprint and facial recognition unlocking mechanisms on phones, I can see where this is a genuine concern and/or problem.



Image by [Kris](#) from [Pixabay](#)



Image by [Bernd Everding](#) from [Pixabay](#)

#### References:

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<https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/08/19/1058243/erik-prince-wants-to-sell-you-a-secure-smartphone-thats-too-good-to-be-true/>.

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Information about the Unplugged Phone: <https://unplugged.com/>