Making Madware a Choice for Everyone

mobilesecurity.com [Culver City, CA] Mid-way through last month's opening ceremony, a solitary, grey-haired man sat at a desk in the middle of the Olympic stadium, and tapped away at a keyboard in front of a few screens. The NBC commentator, without skipping a beat, was heard to say, "and if you don't know who that man is, then don't worry, we don't know who he is either, Google him...".

The commentary team almost certainly had copious notes to explain every detail of the ceremony, and yet they failed to recognise Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the world wide web. Between Berners-Lee, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, this trio of cyberstars has changed the world beyond all recognition. They've revolutionised the way people communicate with friends and family – and perhaps more significantly, the way businesses communicate with their customers.

Berners-Lee introduced HTTP, paving the way for internet communications. Gates, with the introduction of Windows, put a desktop PC in every home, school and workplace, while Jobs and Co. transformed the mobile internet. As a consequence, we live in a world where advertising pays for the energy drinks being guzzled by app developers in basements across the world.

Consumers have become blasé about marketing messages that are key to the continuation of the freeware category, and fortunately for developers, there's a significant population willing put up with in-product advertising.

In the mobile world, Symantec is discovering numerous ad networks that go beyond what might be called reasonable force when it comes to subjecting customers to advertising. Mobile adware

or madware, as it’s known, is a nuisance that disrupts customer experience and causes irritation beyond consternation and potentially exposes location details, contact information and device identifiers to cybercriminals. Location and device information can be legitimately collected by advertising networks – as it helps them target users with appropriate advertising. It isn’t far removed from current desktop advertising which, for example, might target a Firefox for Mac user in Seattle with ads for appropriate products.

What is becoming apparent with some madware is that it pushes consumer tolerance to the limit by gaining permission to make phones calls or send text messages. Five of the most annoying habits of madware include sending alerts to the notification bar, adding icons to your device, to change browser settings, gather personal information and even change the ringtone. What makes madware such a nuisance development, is that in many cases consumers have no idea what these ad networks are doing, and they can be left with astronomical phone bills or become a victim of identity theft if these activities go unchecked.

The proliferation of madware is unlikely to halt any time soon – it’s a rapidly expanding category that offers opportunities to those looking to drive revenues through the mobile advertising platform. But because it presents real concerns in terms of consumer privacy and security, the industry has a responsibility to address the issue. Symantec is working hard to educate consumers about the tell-tale signs to look out for, and by introducing Norton Spot, is now protecting Android users from the worst culprits. Norton Spot analyses the each app on your device, and flags those that contain madware. Consumers are then able to see which apps carry the most annoying madware, uninstall those apps and help avoid irritating icons, alerts and notifications and prevents your personal information getting in the wrong hands.

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