

# Wireless World: A looming 'cell hell'

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You may have left it in the back seat of the cab. Or in the booth at the restaurant at lunch. Or even at your client's office. Whatever the case may be, it is likely that you lost your mobile phone last year. Research shows that 65 percent of Americans lost their cell phones last year -- and it cost \$600 million to replace them.

Losing a phone due to absentmindedness is not just frustrating, though. It's causing anxiety in the IT departments of many major corporations, because, these days, mobile phones are so powerful that most of them are mini-PCs, containing customer information, phone numbers and pricing schedules.

A lost phone may mean a data breach these days, as e-mail isn't the only application found on the devices.

"More mobile applications are being developed to complement e-mail, such as CRM (customer resource management) and ERP (enterprise resource planning) to make mobility and the deployment of mobile devices even more valuable for the enterprise," a spokesman for Mirapoint, a messaging security company based in Silicon Valley, told Wireless World.

There are a number of things that IT departments are doing to secure that kind of data on mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs). One tactic is to store all the customer data in a "virtual locker," where all the content, even e-mail, ring tones, games and wallpaper, can be retrieved if the device itself is lost. This technology was developed by

a mobile provider called Oasys.

But, there are concerns about this kind of storage too. There is a risk to storing this kind of data off-site. Unless it is encrypted, it can be hacked by all manner of computer hooligans. So storage companies like Idealstor are developing removable, encrypted hard drives for pocket PCs and PDAs to make sure the data is concealed all the time from criminals.

Essentially, the emergence of these security measures means that mobile phones and PDAs and pocket PCs are becoming the new "desktop" for professionals, replacing the PC, a spokesman for SavaJe Technologies, a developer of mobile applications, based in Chelmsford, Mass., told the Web. "This is a really hot topic for corporations," the spokesman said.

The hackers and computer criminals, of course, are following the money, so to speak, and are targeting the mobile devices with specialized viruses called "skulls" and "duts." So even if you are among the 45 percent of mobile phone owners who don't lose their phones on an annual basis, you are still at risk of losing your mobile data. Similar to a Trojan Horse virus seen on desktop computers for years, these cyber-critters can render nearly all applications inoperable on a mobile device, the SavaJe spokesman said.

According to Gartner, an IT consulting company, more widespread attacks on mobile phones, PDAs and personal PCs are expected this year. "The impending 'cell hell' has renewed the industry's call for a new kind of mobile platform," said the SavaJe spokesman.

Further illustrating the need for security for these mobile devices, Gartner said that as much as 40 percent of corporate data will reside on the handheld devices.

Corporate IT departments, however, are not alone in grappling with this problem. "Cellular carrier networks are being opened up to allow use by other companies, and the growth of wireless LANs (local area networks) and the emergence of mobile virtual network operators are creating new opportunities for mobile network businesses," Heiko Stuken, president and chief executive officer of a network security firm, called Hotbrick Network Solutions, told The Web. "The growth of 3G (third generation) cellular phone service will lead to mobile broadband businesses."

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