

## S.Korea raises privacy concerns on smartphone apps

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South Korean customers look at the Apple iPhone 4 at the headquarters of KT in Seoul on September 10, 2010. Seoul prosecutors said Tuesday they have charged a South Korean company with illegally collecting customers' personal information via a smartphone application in a rare legal case.

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The Seoul District Prosecutors' Office accuses TomatoTV, a financial television station, of illegally collecting the information through an app designed to let users check live stock market updates.

The firm stores on its server each [smartphone](#) device's identification codes, so that users do not have to log in every time they access the

service.

But the company failed to provide sufficient explanation to customers that such sensitive private information is being stored online, the prosecutors said in a statement Tuesday.

They said the company, which stored some 83,000 sets of mobile ID codes on its server, is charged with violating laws on telecommunications and protection of privacy.

The two ID codes-- International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) and User Service Identity Module (USIM) chip serial number -- could, if stolen, allow others to see what the original user is doing through the app, they said.

"This case will offer guidelines on what information should be protected as privacy and highlight that app developers should pay more attention to collection and management of private information when developing new programs," the prosecutors said in their statement.

They said they also charged a software company that developed the app, without revealing its name.

TomatoTV challenged the indictment, saying "excessive legal enforcement" would stifle the fledgling local smartphone [app](#) industry.

"We believe these two identity codes are merely information about a device, not about its users," a company spokesman told AFP.

South Korea's mobile phone market is one of the world's most vigorous, with 45 million users in a population of 49 million.

Smartphones still have a relatively small share but sales have risen

rapidly in recent months. There are now 3.67 million smartphone users in the country, 7.4 percent of the total.

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