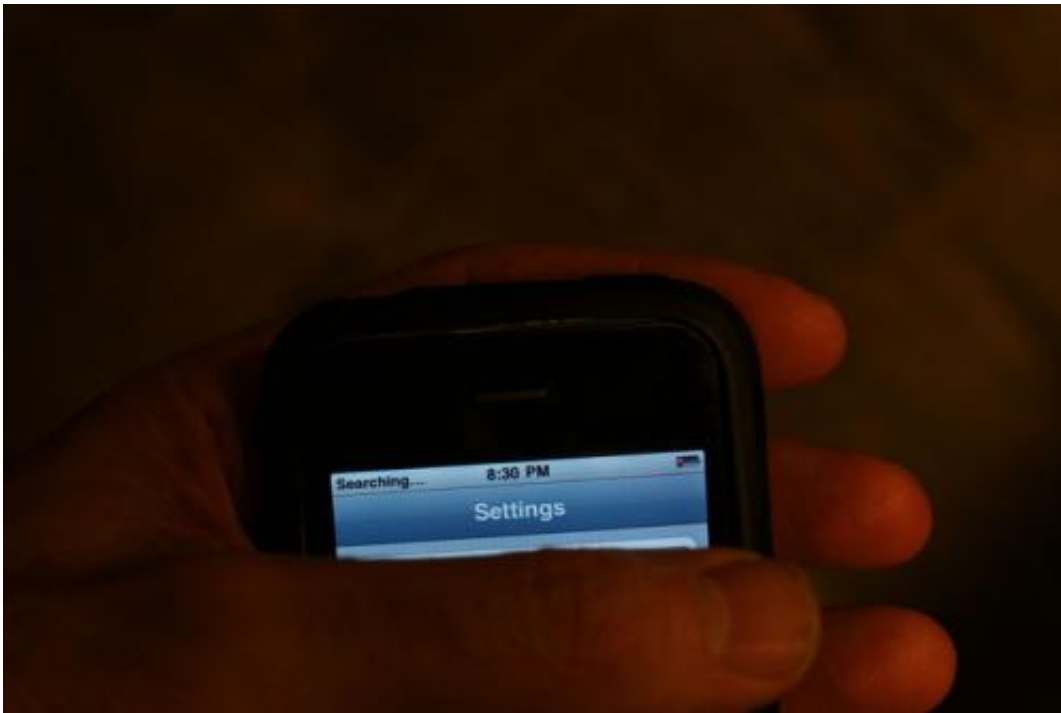


A dead phone may stop you entering the US—here's how to keep it alive on the move

July 10 2014, by Andrew Smith



Uh oh, don't let US customs see this. Credit: Michael Kuhn, CC BY-NC-SA

I find international travel tedious. While the destination is always exciting, the journey is simply a chore to be endured. Watching a movie on your laptop or browsing the internet on your phone can make the process easier, but this now leaves you open to a major risk: what if your device dies and then gets confiscated?

The new [security advice](#) from US customs officials threatens exactly this. Passengers flying to the US may be asked to switch on their devices, and those that do not [power](#) up will not be allowed onboard.

This move is possibly a reasonable response to gathered intelligence. But most average travellers are now worried that they could be caught with a flat battery during their travels and lose that precious smartphone, tablet or [laptop](#).

So what do you do, how do you cope? Here are the best ways to survive these journeys and ensure that you still have enough electronic juice during your security frisk.

Develop good habits

Smartphones and tablets eat power when trying to communicate – whether through GPS or mobile broadband (3G/4G). Putting these devices into flight mode long before you set off makes a considerable difference. Avoiding Facebook, email and other social media may seem challenging, but for the duration of your journey this may not be such a bad thing.

Laptops have similar issues with power and communication – you should disable your wifi if you aren't able to go online anyway. But the greatest consumer of power on all laptops is actually the screen. Reduce its brightness if you want to preserve your battery.

When I travel, I'm always on the lookout for power; some airports are dire, others wonderful. Premium lounges are an option – they will charge, yet there is wifi and electrons in abundance. If you are on a budget, then consider some of the many coffee shops or bars, you will be surprised at how many power outlets are available.

But, rather than leaving any of your devices on standby, just switch them off. Standby will slowly eat valuable power, especially for phones and tablets.

Power up

There are many forms of [battery packs](#) and solar panels out there, depending on your preferred way to charge devices on the move. Some [battery packs](#) can recharge your smartphone at least four times before losing their charge. Many of these are available for around £20 each – why not?

Most airlines now accept electronic tickets, via your smart phone, adding dilemma to the security advice. This does make this low cost addition to your travel plans very worthwhile. Getting to the check-in desk and finding you can't even load up your ticket would simply add insult to the injury of a dead [device](#).

Recharging options for your laptop are more expensive. They consume more power, so you need to have an external battery with greater capacity. These devices are [available](#), but cost £100 or more. You do need to decide if this is really worth the investment and the additional weight commitment.

If you expect plenty of sun, and have money to burn, you could always use a [solar power battery charger](#). But these are cumbersome as well as expensive. Popular with individuals who [travel](#) to far flung locations – how else would you check your Facebook while on a desert island? – but maybe not the best solution for that city break or trip to Disney World.

Read a book?

Instead of seeing this new security directive as an imposition, here's a radical suggestion: simply switch off your laptop or tablet and put it in your hold luggage.

Books have been around for some considerable time. Caxton made it easy for us to transport some great ideas via bound volumes of printed type. Books are good for the soul and every long trip I take, I invest in a new book. Devices such as kindles do have long battery lives, but are still likely to be checked by airport security.

While books may keep us off Facebook and BuzzFeed, they can't replace everything your phone does. So my main recommendation is to invest in an external battery charger for your smartphone. Having enough power for more than one charge per phone could prove to be essential.

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