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Hold the Phone! Are You Protecting the Data on Your Smartphone?

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With all the connectivity back to the office and the ability to work remotely, the protection your company's data is getting more and more difficult. Recently, customer of mine lost their Smartphone. The phone was setup to sync to an Exchange server and had email, contacts, and calendar items synced to it. In this case, none of the data that was on the phone was sensitive. But this example shows how easily sensitive data can be accessed by others who should not have access to it. Having a plan of what to do in the case of a lost Smartphone is necessary to protect your data. I will give you a few tips to help secure your data.

Tip #1 – Know what data is on the phone

Determine if the data is of sensitive nature for your business. For instance, if you are only syncing contact names and phone numbers, the loss of your phone may be of little consequence. On the other hand, if you sync your email, there may be sensitive data on your phone. You need a plan of how to remotely wipe the data from a lost or stolen phone. This is a very important step for people whose data fall under HIPPA, GLBA or other similar compliance legislation.

Tip #2 – Place a password on the phone.

This may seem like common sense but not everyone does it. Placing a password on the phone does a couple of things. First, it creates a hurdle that someone who finds or stole the phone would have to break to get into the phone. Second, it can buy you valuable time to remotely wipe the data off the phone and call the phone provider to have them disable the service on the phone.

Tip #3 – Test your remote wipe capabilities

Different phones with the different operating systems vary on how the phone can be remotely wiped. For instance, I have seen the Blackberry Enterprise Server have the ability to completely disable a remote phone's functionality. But this technology is related directly to Blackberries. When using just

Exchange with a Windows Mobile Smartphone or an IPhone, or a combination of all three, it becomes necessary to know what your software can and cannot do as there is the potential to have multiple versions of Exchange and multiple versions of Windows Mobile running simultaneously.

Tip #4 – Limit the amount of data you sync to your phone

Is it really necessary to sync six weeks of email to your phone? Can you limit it to the email you received in the last two days? Likewise, can you limit the amount of contacts and calendar items to what is really necessary for your job functionality? Trimming the data limits your vulnerability.

Remember, good security is a multi-layered approach that helps to mitigate your risks. In the same manner that you put locks on the doors and windows of your business, and may even opt for an electronic security system; protecting the data on your phone is one item in your overall business security plan. Planning your security strategy is key to your business's overall long term success in keeping your private data secure.

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