

Your cell phone can scream when stolen

By John Chan

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Singapore start-up tenCube has launched WaveSecure, a service intended to protect the data in mobile phones and cellular handhelds if they are lost or stolen.

Supporting some of the most popular handset operating systems (OS) including Symbian and Windows Mobile, WaveSecure does a few different things to track, protect and remove data even after the mobile phone is lost.

Part of how the service works requires installing an application on the user's mobile phone. This is done like any other third-party program and can be performed by the customer without any special procedure. An activation process is required from there, and this uses a data connection on the mobile phone. If no data connections like Wi-Fi or GPRS are available on the handset, it will be completed via SMS to the tenCube servers.

One key feature of WaveSecure is its ability to track the phone number of a SIM card inserted into the cellular device. So if someone swaps the SIM card, the phone number associated with it will be sent to the online server and the rightful owner can then view that number by logging into his account on the WaveSecure Web site. Besides giving the owner the option to call the finder, this also provides information for reporting to the police if such an action is necessary.

Logging on to the online account also lets the user lock the phone. The mobile phone will then be rendered useless with a preset message displayed on the screen. This can give the finder information on how to contact the owner. Data can as well be remotely wiped out using the WaveSecure online dashboard for added security. Users can additionally cause a screaming voice to be emitted from the device. This works even when the phone is in silent mode, and is intended to embarrass the finder of the device. Turning off the power will stop the screaming, but it resumes as soon as power is restored.

When asked if thieves with technical know-how would be able to remove the software before making use of the phone, CEO of tenCube Darius Cheung said that ordinary procedures like using the Add/Remove programs setting will not work. A hard reset of the device will clear out the software, but in the process that will also remove any user data on the handset, fulfilling the software's objective of ensuring that data doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

Besides securing data on the device, WaveSecure also gives the option to back up data on its online servers. This includes contacts, text messages and photos. Users can choose to let the software automatically back up data incrementally over an active data connection

like GPRS. This would, of course, incur data charges with the operator, but on tenCube's part the company is currently not charging for space used on its servers.

The list of phones supported by WaveSecure is listed on its Web site. This includes most Symbian devices including both the Series 60 interface favored by Nokia and the UIQ interface found on Sony Ericsson's smart phones. Other supported devices include Windows Mobile ones, both touchscreen and smart phone versions, as well as selected Linux-based devices from Motorola.

Ming H. Chong, director, Business Development for tenCube told CNET Asia that proprietary OSes found in consumer-oriented mobile phones like LG, Samsung and Nokia Series 40 are not easily open to development, and are thus not currently supported. He does not rule out the possibility of supporting them, but that is dependent on the manufacturers' willingness to allow the software on their platforms.

Though not currently commercially available, WaveSecure is undergoing a three-month open trial by invitation. Interested parties may request for an invitation code from tenCube. The company was not able to reveal the price of the service after the trial, but said it will "ensure that this service remains affordable to consumers".

At this point, the consumer version is available only for trial in Singapore. Talks are in progress to release it in other Asia-Pacific countries, though tenCube did not reveal which countries specifically.