



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on July 31, 2009

Apple Says Hacked iPhones Are Dangerous

Wired reported on July 28 that the Electronic Frontier Foundation is asking the U.S. Copyright Office to legalize the practice of hacking Apple's iPhone "to accept software that hasn't been approved for distribution through the iPhone App Store."

Apple says such hacking, known as jailbreaking, could allow iPhones to be used for "potentially catastrophic" cyberattacks on the nation's cellphone networks.

Apple claims that jailbreaking an iPhone could open the door for hackers to alter the "baseband processor" (BBP) software that enables a connection to cellphone towers. "A local or international hacker could potentially initiate commands (such as a denial of service attack) that could crash the tower software, rendering the tower entirely inoperable to process calls or transmit data," Apple wrote in a [document](#) submitted to the Copyright Office. "Taking control of the BBP software would be much the equivalent of getting inside the firewall of a corporate computer — to potentially catastrophic result."



According to Apple: "The technological protection measures were designed into the iPhone precisely to prevent these kinds of pernicious activities, and if granted, the jailbreaking exemption would open the door to them." Of course, the protective measures also allow Apple to maintain the closed business model they've had since the iPhone was introduced in 2007. Over 30 million iPhones have been sold, and Apple told the Copyright Office that this success can be attributed to the way the iPhone is locked down.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation has submitted to the office a [document](#) requesting an exemption from the Digital Millennium Copyright Act that would allow jailbreaking. Estimating that a million iPhones have already been jailbroken, the EFF says Apple's argument is ridiculous. Even with this many hacked iPhones, the EFF is unaware of any cellphone towers that have been crippled by iPhone hackers. The group thinks the threat is more theoretical than real, and if Apple were correct, "The open-source Android phone from Google on T-Mobile networks would also be a menace to society."

Apple also claims that jailbreaking could allow hackers to change the iPhone's Exclusive Chip Identification number that cellphone towers use to recognize a specific phone. Calls could then be placed anonymously, which Apple notes would be desirable to criminals such as drug dealers.

Whether or not Apple is exaggerating the danger, not all iPhone users who are concerned about



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anonymity would necessarily be criminals. After all, Apple has paired its iPhone with AT&T's network. AT&T has cooperated so far with the federal government's efforts to spy on innocent Americans, as pointed out by security and privacy researcher Christopher Soghoian in a July 26 [blog entry](#). Users of Apple's iPhone have every reason to believe their privacy has been invaded, and their desire to thwart this surveillance is understandable.

Do privacy concerns justify jailbreaking? Are the potential dangers from hacking real enough to warrant concern? If Apple's copyright protections are not honored, what motivation is there for Apple to keep on producing cutting-edge products? What would hackers gain if their jailbreaking only results in Apple discontinuing the iPhone? There may be no easy answers to these questions, but one can only hope that the Copyright Office considers all sides of the debate and renders a fair decision.



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