

A New Twist on Corporate Responsibility



Deb Allen, 2007-03-08

I usually avoid all television news, quasi- and otherwise, but I couldn't help but watch a Dateline story the other night:

"[to catch_an i-Jacker](#)" (w1ck3d 1337, NBC!)



The premise was a bit weak: Leave an expensive iPod out in a public place, and -- shocker! -- it walks away. I'm the most trusting person on the planet & not so much a fan of locks either, but even *I* saw that one coming. Confrontational drama ensues as they track down some of the devices, sensationalistic hidden camera journalism at its best.

But they quickly moved on to a more engaging discussion of whether Apple should be responsible for maintaining the database necessary (and providing access to it) to help re-unite lost/found iPods with their owners: Of course Apple already maintains a registration database, so why can't they provide registration details regarding stolen devices upon request? Apple declined to officially respond, but various Apple Store managers offered some reasons:

- it's too much data: With over 100 million customers, they couldn't possibly maintain a database that large (so how do they manage all those iTunes Store accounts again...?);
- registration data submitted may not be accurate or useful in tracking down the device or owner;
- security and/or privacy concerns;
- and, of course, most likely Apple just doesn't want to get involved due to the potential liability and/or resources required to provide such service.

The thing is, though, that people have been attacked and even killed over these gotta-have little gadgets, and in its current incarnation, an iPod or iPhone is a freely transferable commodity once it's "disassociated" with the owner.

The market value of stolen iPods/phones/whatever would obviously be severely depressed if they were no longer fully functional once stolen. Other service providers, such as mobile phone vendors, have provided service blocking for reported stolen devices, and may also flag them for retention if they are ever brought into a service center for trade-in or maintenance.

Since Apple seems unwilling to step up to that plate just yet, one pundit opined that Apple could provide the tracking/blocking service as part of their existing paid service subscription plan. (Doesn't seem like you should have to pay extra for that, but at least it would be something, and there's a business model to support it.) With an iPod, though, you don't necessarily have to register with Apple to use it, and may never request service from Apple, so only part of its intrinsic value would be compromised under this plan.

But there does seem to be a happy ending waiting in the wings: Apple has applied for patent protection on a scheme to disable re-charging of their devices until you can prove ownership via iTunes. Since Apple is not only the primary service provider, but also the manufacturer, they have the ability to leverage that unique monopoly for the greater good. I suppose a more cynical view might be that it's only a play to further niche-ify their product line -- "You might get murdered for your MP3 player, but not your iPod"...? I suppose we'll have to wait and see how it plays out.

In the meantime, here's the best iPod personal security tip I've heard so far:

DON'T use the white earbuds -- dead giveaway, especially in the dark. (I don't care how cool it looks in the posters.)

Be safe out there...

Peace

F5 Networks, Inc. | 401 Elliot Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119 | 888-882-4447 | f5.com

F5 Networks, Inc.
Corporate Headquarters
info@f5.com

F5 Networks
Asia-Pacific
apacinfo@f5.com

F5 Networks Ltd.
Europe/Middle-East/Africa
emeainfo@f5.com

F5 Networks
Japan K.K.
f5j-info@f5.com