

Has the FBI Managed to Hack the San Bernardino Terrorist's iPhone?

March 23, 2016 – It has been over a month since we first told our readers about the FBI's efforts to force Apple Computer into hacking its own iPhone operating system so that a phone used by one of the terrorists in San Bernardino could be accessed. The FBI won a lower court case on the matter but appealed the decision. But just as the case was getting ready to move back into a courtroom, the FBI abruptly asked the court to put a hold on their lawsuit. At about the same time, rumors began to circulate that the FBI had found a way to break into the phone without the help of Apple.

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s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
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})();
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Although the FBI isn't saying about the court case, only that they think they have a method to break into the phone. That method is believed to come from an Israeli company named Cellebrite. The company is under contract with the agency to provide data extraction services.

The method likely requires the company to have physical access to the phone. Based on various reports, we believe that they are copying the data on the phone and then trying to break into the copy repeatedly. After ten tries, the phone will lock up, at which point the company would restore the operating system from their backup copy and then try again. Theoretically if they restore the operating system 1,000 times, they would have a 100% chance of breaking into the phone; and it may not take them that long.

Using this method to break into the phone will have a minimal effect on the privacy of data for most iPhone owners because this type of break-in requires direct access to the phone. It can't be done remotely. But it does open a door for law enforcement agencies to gain access to stored data on other iPhones if they can get a warrant to seize the phone.

There is no word on how long it will actually take the FBI or Cellebrite to complete their hack of the phone.

by Jim Malmberg

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