

future of mobile privacy

improved control over privacy protection

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Users' privacy is difficult to protect on today's smartphones. Deutsche Telekom (T-Labs, Telekom Group Privacy) and Mozilla have jointly launched "The Future of Mobile Privacy" initiative. The main question of this fruitful cooperation is: How do we give users more control over their devices, as well as increase overall trust and safety in the mobile ecosystem?

privacy in mobile communication

In a world where data is collected on a mass scale and where information about what we buy or where we live has monetary value, users increasingly want to preserve their privacy. Although people use social networks, navigation services and phones in public places, they still want to control what they expose. This is a difficult task with modern smartphones: Every action, even as simple as opening a web page, triggers a reaction – in this case, servers may gain knowledge about phone types, web browsers and location.

Studies have shown that many users are only vaguely aware of this problem, if at all. They do not know how they can improve their privacy protection with today's smartphones. Among other things, this is due to today's phones making it unnecessarily difficult for users to change these settings, while some of the more privacy-affecting features are simply hard-wired into popular mobile operating systems.

users in control

Together with Mozilla, T-Labs and Telekom Group Privacy are working on "The Future of Mobile Privacy", an initiative started in 2012 that first led to the prototype development of simple, effective and user-driven privacy features for mobile devices. These features are based on the fully open-source Firefox OS and comes with extensions that give its users more control of their personal data. At the same time, Firefox OS is highly customizable and thus allows carrier-specific enhancements on all levels. "The Future of Mobile Privacy" combines solutions familiar from desktops with mobility-specific requirements and features in one mobile phone for the first time. This concept has the average or first-time user in mind, and its main purpose is to enable them to understand and handle their own privacy settings. This means improved privacy is no longer a privilege for specialized or high-end devices.

The new prototyped features offer a range of new functionalities, such as "Location Accuracy", which allows users to decide whether social networks or commercial websites can determine precisely where they are, or just get a rough idea. It's possible to find/locate the phone if it gets lost, as well as wipe it remotely. The "Guest Mode" can be used when lending a phone to a friend, or as a means of parental control. An analyzer shows what resources access the apps installed on the phone, ensuring that unnecessary (or unwanted) actions can be limited.

easy to use

The prototyped features are designed for the average user, and they are not intended to help hide criminals from civil agencies or endorse illegal activity. The unique design centralizes access to the features in one app and focuses on simplicity of use with a friendly user experience. Simultaneously, it gives users full control and also explains each feature and why some information might not be required, despite being shared on other phones. Users who prefer to be in control will be able to access each and every setting clearly and consistently. No more searching the menu, trying to memorize where each element was – now all privacy-relevant settings can be found in one place.

The Telekom-Mozilla joint initiative will introduce the individual features of the concept step-by-step in upcoming versions of Firefox OS. The privacy panel, a superior user interface and great way to customize and differentiate Telekom's products from the average privacy-ignorant smartphone, is among the first of these features to be positioned on the roadmap.