

Protecting Portable Devices: Physical Security

Many computer users, especially those who travel for business, rely on laptops, Smartphones and PDAs because they are small and easily transported. But while these characteristics make them popular and convenient, they also make them an ideal target for thieves. Make sure to secure your portable devices to protect both the machine and the information it contains.

What is at risk?

Only you can determine what is actually at risk. If a thief steals your laptop, smartphone or PDA, the most obvious loss is the machine itself. However, if the thief is able to access the information on the computer or mobile device, all of the information stored on the device is at risk, as well as any additional information that could be accessed as a result of the data stored on the device itself.

Sensitive information or Private Identifiable Information (PII) or customer account information should not be accessed by unauthorized people. You've probably heard news stories about organizations panicking because laptops with confidential information on them have been lost or stolen. But even if there isn't any sensitive corporate information on your laptop or PDA, think of the other information at risk: information about appointments, passwords, email addresses and other contact information, personal information for online accounts, etc.

How can you protect your laptop or PDA?

- **Password-protect your computer** - Make sure that you have to enter a password to log in to your computer. The password should meet the City Password Policy.
- **SmartPhone or Mobile device** – Make sure that you have entered, at minimum, a 4 digit pin number to access the device. Best practices are to encrypt the hard drive of the mobile device with a strong password when possible. Many mobile devices have the capability to wipe the device remotely if it is lost or stolen. Enable this option on your device if possible. However, the wiping of the device should be the last resort as; all the data will be lost.
- **Keep your laptop, Smartphone or PDA with you at all times** - When traveling, keep your device with you. Meal times are optimum times for thieves to check hotel rooms for unattended laptops. If you are attending a conference or trade show, be especially wary—these venues offer thieves a wider selection of devices that are likely to contain sensitive information, and the conference sessions offer more opportunities for thieves to access guest rooms.
- **Downplay your laptop or PDA** - There is no need to advertise to thieves

- that you have a laptop or PDA. Avoid using your portable device in public areas, and consider non-traditional bags for carrying your laptop.
- **Consider an alarm or lock** - Many companies sell alarms or locks that you can use to protect or secure your laptop. If you travel often or will be in a heavily populated area, you may want to consider investing in an alarm for your laptop bag or a lock to secure your laptop to a piece of furniture.
 - **Back up your files** - If your mobile device is stolen, it's bad enough that someone else may be able to access your information. To avoid losing all of the information, make backups of important information and store the backups in a separate location. Not only will you still be able to access the information, but you'll be able to identify and report exactly what information is at risk.

What can you do if your laptop or PDA is lost or stolen?

Report the loss or theft to the appropriate authorities. These parties may include representatives from law enforcement agencies, as well as hotel or conference staff. If your device contained sensitive corporate or customer account information, immediately report the loss or theft to your organization so that they can act quickly.