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Over the last 2 decades, computers have become a ubiquitous part of our daily lives. The majority of computer users are now aware that their PC or Mac needs to be protected from malware â€“ the malicious software that can infect your machine and cause operating problems or steal your personal details. However, considerably fewer people know that malware can also affect mobile phones that access the internet. And thanks to the rapid rise in the popularity of smartphones, mobile malware has never been better poised to make an impact on peopleâ€™s daily lives. Read on to find out how mobile malware can affect your smartphone.

Reportedly, the first mobile phone virus to be detected is Caribe (also known as Cabir). Discovered in 2004, Caribe targeted mobile phones that ran on the Symbian operating system and spread through Bluetooth. Later on a version of Caribe was developed that could also spread through MMS (multimedia messaging service). Since then, there's been the development of Ikee, the iPhone virus, and a mobile version of the Zeus Trojan, which aims to steal a userâ€™s personal banking information. In the late 2000s, over 83 mobile phone viruses were detected and this number keeps on growing.

In 2012, the Third mSecurity Survey found that mobile malware incidents rose by 24 per cent in 2011, up nine per cent from the previous year. However, the ways in which mobile malware can affect smartphones are various and tend to be regionally-influenced. For instance, the Ikee virus was initially known for infecting unlocked iPhones in Australia. Infected devices would show an image of 1980s pop star Rick Astley on their home screen, with the text â€œikee is never going to give you upâ€• attached. Though the virus was largely seen to be harmless, it did demonstrate the potential of iPhones to be subjected to damaging malware attacks.

In Russia and the Far East, mobile malware attacks have been more significant, with some viruses paving the way for premium rate tariff fraud. As yet, there has been no major mobile malware attack on smartphones in Europe and the United States. However, some mobile phone statistics in the UK give cause for concern. Surveys show that 9 million people in the UK have lost their phones at least once; and 2.2 million more than once. Almost half of these users do not block their lost or stolen phones, which leaves any personal details stored or accessed by their smartphones open to damaging attacks.

Some companies who provide malware protection have been offering a free anti virus download, in order to highlight the importance of smartphone protection. And with mobile malware rates expected to rise again in 2012, it looks like mobile antivirus software could soon become as essential as computer protection.

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