

Vanishing, Self-Destructing Texting, and Electronic Communication

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Introduction

Cell phone texting is the standard way young people, who at times seem to be addicted to their devices, communicate with one another. Proactive parents may monitor their children's activity by sneaking into their child's bedroom while they are sleeping, grab their cell phone and then review all of their cell phone text messages. Most young people don't bother to delete their text messages, but instead wait for their text messages to be pushed out of the cell phone memory. A review of a young person's cell phone text messages may provide a parent or another caring adult with information such as who your child talks to, where they are going, and what they're doing.

Unfortunately, all of that may be in the past. Today, some new cell phone text messaging services keep cell phone texting activity increasingly private.

Vanishing Texts

Initially marketed in the United Kingdom to people who desired maximum levels of privacy and anonymity, vanishing text messaging service or small message services (SMS) have recently become available for users in the United States. The service, which has a variety of names, allows one to send text messages that will vanish from the sender's and the receiver's cell phone after a selected period of time. The selected vanishing time may be as short as 60 seconds or as long as 30 days. For simplicity, some users may simply choose the "delete on read" feature of the vanishing text service. Other features of the vanishing text service will prevent one from copying or even forwarding the text messages. To effectively use the vanishing text messaging service, the sender and the receiver must both have the service installed on their respective devices. The service is available as an application (or app) for many smart phones for a monthly charge.

Vanishing Email and Social Networking Posting Text

Those who are extremely privacy conscious, often agonize about emails once they get out onto the Internet or worry about postings on social networking sites, may want a program called Vanish. This software was developed as a research project at the University of Washington. Vanish can place a time limit (maximum eight hours) on the encrypted text that is uploaded to any web service through a web browser. After the time is set, the encrypted text that was written using Vanish will, just as in Mission Impossible, "self-destruct." At that point the encrypted text becomes irretrievable from web sites, social networking sites, inboxes, outboxes, backup sites and even home computers. The Vanish software is designed to work with social networking messages or wall posts as well as several types of email.

Not to Worry

Fortunately, none of the software that is discussed in this article is perfect. Using a screen-capture application or app with a cell phone may be one method to defeat the vanishing cell phone text messaging service. A screen-capture, simply described, is a photograph or image file of the entire active screen of a cell phone or computer. For instance downloading and installing the BlackBerry app CaptureIt on a cell phone will provide a tool that makes an exact image of the current BlackBerry screen. The image can then be saved to the external memory card or to the device memory. Once installed on a Blackberry, a convenience key may be assigned to the

CaptureIt application. Thereafter one is able to perform screen-captures of text messages with a simple click and without having to use the menu option.

If you send someone an email with the text initially encrypted with the Vanish software, it still may not be as safe as one would think. All the receiver of the message has to do is highlight the text, copy and then paste the unencrypted version before the “self-destruct” time. Using this simple method one will still have a permanent copy of the text in your email.

Conclusion

Unfortunately there often is a huge disconnect between parents, young people, and technology. As stated above, some of the design of some evolving technology can push us farther apart. In order to protect young people, one must stay current and re-connect with ever changing technology.

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