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Spoofting a culture of caution will help safeguard against the hidden dangers of caller ID spoofing, ensuring your business remains resilient in the face of evolving threats. Spoofing has enabled people to fake the return number it is shown by Caller IDs for many years and the ability to "spoo" a phone number has become widespread. Spoofting, in simple terms, just means that the number shown on someone's caller ID is not the actual number that is placing the call. As opposed to a fake number, spoofing a number lets callers appear to be a number more familiar with the recipient. People spoof caller ID numbers for a wide variety of reasons. They perform a classic prank call to their neighbor or friend. They protect their privacy and phone information from being captured and sold to third parties. They want a secondary number captured by recipients. They want to reserve their actual phone number for their close family and friends while using a secondary number for "social media" friends and other parties. They call a debt collector with a spoofed number to avoid repeated calls in the future. They investigate a number they are curious about. They attempt to confirm or investigate a "potential" scam call. They use it to actually scam others by faking the number so the recipient thinks it is someone local, or a person or business they know. With more and more people starting to ignore calls from unfamiliar numbers and sending them to voicemail automatically, it has made pulling off a classic prank call trickier. However, spoofing a number that the victim recognizes, has become a popular scenario for scam artists and pranksters alike. In 2020, it's more important than ever to practice safety when it comes to your personal identification. While it may be difficult to change your phone number on all services or registrations to a spoofed number, you can still protect your identity by making sure that your new number spreads to as many services as possible. This way, you will receive return calls on a number that can be easily disposed of if anything were ever to go wrong with the intended caller. Yes. At its core, there's nothing illegal about the act of spoofing caller ID with a false number in the United States. It is your intentions that generally determine the legality of your actions. If you hide your real number to contact a business to protect your personal information, it's legal. If you fake your phone number to investigate a potentially risky call, it is legal. If you get a second phone number for specific contacts, it is legal. If you hide your real number to prank a caller, it is often legal, but your actions may be considered illegal depending on location and circumstances. It can be an act of falsifying information in an attempt to harass or abuse, etc. If you spoof your phone number to scam the recipient, it is questionably legal, but your intentions and actions are definitely illegal! If you call from a disposable number to threaten the recipient, it is possibly illegal due to your intentions and the falsification of caller identity (trickery). However, the action of threatening the recipient is definitely illegal. For legitimate, non-criminal motivations, you are in the clear. So using a spoofed number to trick your friend into thinking that the President is calling him on his birthday may be more or less funny depending on your sense of humor, but it is legal. The official word from the FCC website! you spoof your number to trick him into thinking he's talking to his credit card company, and you attempt to get his card details, it is a crime. There are basically three different ways to spoof a number or call. You can register for a permanent number with a call forwarding website or app. You can get a temporary number from sites more oriented towards "burner" numbers. You can use various apps to enter a false phone number that displays on the recipient's caller ID, while actually just using your own number to make the call. You can't personally stop the identity leaks from happening, but by using a spoofed number, you can make the fallout a little less catastrophic. Spoofed numbers can come in two different varieties, depending on what you're looking for. Permanent numbers don't change or recycle and can be held by you for as long as you'll need them. In fact, they're a real number, just connected to a phone you don't answer if they're connected to a phone at all. Disposable numbers, on the other hand, are designed to be cycled through, used for a certain duration before being tossed in the trash. Whether or not that's something you're looking to use is up to you, and really, the type of number you'll be using really depends on the scenario you find yourself in. Still, we'll cover both options below, with some great suggestions for both free and paid spoof numbers. While you still have to dedicate some time to managing your fake number, as you would your real number, you're secure if your false number ever leaks online. These permanent services usually offer some amount of call blocking and restricting features. Being able to ensure your number is always in your grasp means that you can place your false number on more important documents, giving it out to your dentist or doctor for appointments, or placing it on job applications to protect your standard account service. Permanent number services are also typically cheaper than their temporary counterparts, as you'll discover in the next segment. The first service you should take a look at for a secondary spoof number is, unsurprisingly, Google Voice. Voice is for someone looking for a secondary, web-based number that doesn't cost anything. Google offers a desktop and mobile web client, along with dedicated clients for both iOS and Android that are sleek and regularly updated. Google Voice allows you to use your assigned secondary number to forward calls to your primary number, all while making free phone calls throughout the United States. Your assigned number is able to be customized as well, so you can select a specific area code throughout the US, or type the last-four digits to make it easy to remember. Like Google Voice, Talkatone is built around providing alternate numbers to call and text US-based users for free (and to call and text numbers outside the United States for small charges). Talkatone even lets you change this number when you need to. This makes the service bit less permanent while simultaneously giving you more flexibility should your number get leaked online. The downside to Talkatone is ads within the app. Textfree has been around for nearly a decade, and you can still grab a free number through their service by signing up through the website or mobile application. You can choose your area code and memorable number patterns when signing up for a number. You can keep the number as long as you want, though you'll need to use it once every 30 days to place a call. There are also paid, premium options available, including Flyp, Hushed, TextNow, and Sideline. Sometimes, you just need a number for one-time use or for a certain period. Disposable numbers are great. You can call a business or an individual, hang up the phone following your conversation, and toss the number away, leaving the person without a way to contact you again. Unfortunately, disposable numbers rarely come without a fee attached. Burner is an app that automatically gives you a new number whenever you need one. Your number is real and can be used to call and text from within the app, and the caller ID displays your Burner info instead of your actual phone number. The app is smooth and responsive, and you get a free number for seven days upon installation. Depending on how many numbers you need and how much you'll be using the app, Burner can get really expensive, really fast. Flyp offers support for multiple secondary numbers, making it easier to cycle through plans. Of course, paying the monthly fees can get expensive rather quickly. If you plan on holding multiple numbers at once, this spoof call service might get costly. Still, the ability to mirror local area codes while placing a call is ideal for someone looking to spoof numbers with only one account, and with great audio quality. Hushed offers both permanent and disposable numbers. The app provides the ability to dispose of numbers at any time, so long as you're paying for the service. Hushed stands out with its end-to-end encryption when talking to other users. This makes the service the most secure phone number app on the list, and that may be important if you're trying to hide your identity. All numbers are disposable. There's no credit card needed to sign up for an account, and calls can be sent and received from anywhere. Hushed is also one of the more affordable paid plans. There are a number of services online that provide spoofed calling numbers on a one-shot basis. That is, after you've registered at the site and paid the subscription fee, you can enter the number you want to call and the number that you want to appear on Caller ID. The call will go through on your smartphone or landline, or via your web browser. You can use as many different numbers as you wish and can assign a new number for every call you make if you want. SpoofCard is reputable, and they are one of the oldest spoofing providers in the industry. SpoofCard offers a number of features, including the ability to artificially disguise your voice and even change its gender presentation. The service also provides the ability to record calls for later playback (priceless if you're planning on pranking your friends), the addition of background noises like traffic, a nightclub, or police activity for added realism, and the ability to send calls directly to voicemail. You can also dial multiple recipients at once, or add more people on your end of the call to listen in. SpoofCard also allows you to send spoofed SMS text messages. The service is definitely optimized for pranksters. SpoofCard offers a 60-second free trial, offers a web version, as well as an Android app and an iOS app. Charges are based on bulk minute packages, paid as a one-off purchase, or as a monthly subscription. SpoofCard supports calls to non-US destinations but uses more credits per minute. SpoofTel is another service providing instant spoofing service on-demand. SpoofTel offers a desktop app for Windows and an iOS app. The iOS version requires a jailbroken phone. SpoofTel has the ability to change your voice pitch and add soundtrack audio to the background. SpoofTel offers SMS text message spoofing as well. Costs are based on a per-minute basis, in addition to added features like voice changing and recording. Spoof Call does not offer app versions; all calls occur via the service's website. The service has some unique features, including call recording, voice changing software, limited background noises, group calls, and a text-to-speech converter with multiple language choices. Spoof Call is based in Europe, but the credits they sell are valid for US calls (among other locations). Since 2015, a group of telecom engineers from major carriers started developing a way to stop call spoofing in its tracks. In recent years, spoofing has gone mainstream. The widespread nature of call spoofing has begun to undermine public trust in the integrity of the phone system. The engineering teams are relying on two new systems to stop it: STIR (Secure Telephone Identity Revisited) and SHAKEN (Signature-based Handling of Asserted information using tokens). The idea behind STIR and SHAKEN is to give every phone a certificate of authenticity, a digital signature, that becomes the sole source of caller ID information. Caller ID would become trustworthy once more. The basic idea is ridiculously complicated, but here is a simplified explanation. A person places a call. That call's data stream would contain the certificate (in digital form) that verified that the call was coming from the number it claims to be coming from. As the phone call passes through the circuitry, the carrier would check the validity of the certificate using a public/private key system. A call whose certificate failed to pass validity would either get blocked or display a warning message in the caller ID field. FCC mandates that all voice carriers effectively implement STIR/SHAKEN authentication by June 30, 2021. There are other resources available at TechJunkie to help you combat call spoofing efforts. Is there a way to tell if a spoofed number is calling? It's highly improbable that you'll know a number is spoofed until you answer the phone call. If someone is spoofing a number that you're familiar with, you probably won't know that's what's happening until you pick up the call. If the number calling is unfamiliar to you but spoofed using the same area code as your phone number, you can do a reverse lookup on the phone number. If the number is spoofed, the search results will turn up no information. Also, calling a spoofed number back will likely result in a busy signal rather than actually getting to talk to someone. How do I avoid being scammed? Spoofed numbers can be incredibly tricky, it gives any scammers the upper-hand. If you receive a phone call from a company asking for any personal information, it's best to hang up and call the company from a phone number that you're familiar with. AT&T for example had an issue with their customer service number being spoofed. The scammers would offer bill credits but they'd need the account Passcode to access the account. Most reputable companies will never ask you for any information if they call you. The FCC warns that scams resulting from spoofed numbers usually happen after a natural disaster, or to gain access to your credit information. Caller ID spoofing has long been the domain of pranksters and scammers, but although the technology often is used unethically, there may be a few legitimate reasons why you would want to disguise your phone number's Caller ID, rather than just block it. Here are a few that come to mind and easy ways to masquerade as someone else. Some Non-Evil Uses for Caller ID Spoofing Thanks to the Caller ID Act of 2009, using Caller ID spoofing for causing harm or defrauding someone is a crime. Telemarketers are also required by the FCC to use an accurate Caller ID number when they call you. Caller ID spoofing in general, however, isn't illegal in the US. There are at least three scenarios where you might want to use it. Perhaps you're working from home one day but need to place a call to a client or customer and want to appear to be working from the office—or just not give out your home or cell number (Doctors in particular may have this need). With Caller ID spoofing, you can appear to be placing the call from your office. Another case scenario is if your friend is ignoring your calls or is simply notoriously hard to get a hold of on the phone, and you really, really need to get through. You should only use Caller ID spoofing in an emergency case, because once your friend answers and finds out you spoofed the Caller ID, it had better be worth it. Caller ID spoofing is also great for surprising young children: You can place a call as Santa or Cinderella or whoever (many services and apps disguise your voice). This might only work with really young children, however, especially with the limited choices you get for voice disguises. How to Spoof Your Caller ID Between 2004 and today, dozens and dozens of Caller ID spoofing companies have been established to meet this incredible need for people to spoof their phone numbers. SpoofCard is one of the biggest and oldest, and it offers a free test drive of its service. Enter your number, the number you want to call, and the number you want to be displayed on their website widget to place the call. This is the service I used to place a call supposedly from 867-5309, you know, from Jenny in that song (SpoofCard unfortunately doesn't let you enter in a Caller ID name). SpoofCard and other services like it work like a calling card, if you've ever used one of those. You dial a number provided to you by the service and then enter an access code or PIN number, plus the recipient's number and your fake caller ID. Also like phone calling cards, you buy credits, starting at \$4.95 for 25 credits (1 minute per credit). Spoofingcards.com has a table comparing SpoofCard with Bluff My Call and Stealth Card, two other services in this space. There are several other providers, and they all seem to work pretty similarly, many with mobile apps so you can spoof away from your cell phone. My advice, if you're going to do this, is to try out the service first if it offers a free call. I tried out SpoofTel, which offers a free trial and also lets you enter in a display name to be shown in Caller ID, but the call came in as "Unknown" to my phone, which pretty much defeated the purpose. Good thing it wasn't a really critical call I needed to get through to myself. Lifehacker's Evil Week is all about topics such as password cracking, social hacking and other questionable tricks to make sure you're in the know. Knowledge is power, and whether you use that power for good or evil is in your hands. You can follow or contact Melanie Pinola, the author of this post, on Twitter or Google+. Your caller identification display (Caller ID) normally indicates the phone number and name associated with the line used to call you. Caller ID spoofing is the act of altering the Caller ID displayed to the person receiving the call. Caller ID spoofing can be used for legitimate and illegitimate purposes. Examples of legitimate use of Caller ID spoofing A call center that places legitimate calls on behalf of clients and alters its Called ID information to display its client's name and telephone number. A doctor calling to discuss a patient's lab results may want to display the hospital's general call back number as their Called ID to direct all future inquiries appropriately. Examples of illegitimate uses of Caller ID spoofing Illegitimate telemarketers that change their Caller ID information to misrepresent themselves and to trick Canadians into answering the call. The Caller ID is altered to match the first 6-digits of your telephone number so that it looks like a local call, perhaps even from a neighbour in your area. This practice is often referred to as "neighbouring". The Caller ID is altered to display your own telephone number. This practice is often referred to as "mirroring". The Caller ID is altered to display the number of another individual and/or organization (i.e., pose as a recognizable brand or a government organization). Is Caller ID spoofing illegal? Telemarketers are required to accurately identify themselves at their client. However, when telemarketers use technology to spoof their Caller ID to display inaccurate, false, or misleading information, they are in direct violation of this requirement. As a result, each violation of the Unsolicited Telecommunications Rules can lead to fines of up to \$1,500 per violation for an individual and up to \$15,000 per violation for a corporation. How do I protect myself from spoofed calls? Register your telephone number on the National Do Not Call List File a complaint about an unwanted telemarketing call Note: If you suspect fraud, you can report it to your local police force or the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (1-888-495-8501), a national service jointly operated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Competition Bureau. Check out our Telemarketing Consumer Alerts page to help you identify common problematic telemarketing campaigns that use Caller ID spoofing. Be cautious if you are asked to provide personal information (e.g., banking information, passwords). When in doubt, hang up and call the number on your bank statement or the organization's website. Certain calling features may be available to you to block or filter unwanted and illegitimate telemarketing calls. Phone service providers and other parties have to provide information on the calling options and features available to help Canadians protect themselves from these calls. Read the Summary of Options Currently Available to Canadians to Manage Unwanted Calls. What else is the CRTC doing about it? Following a public consultation, we have issued a notice of consultation to better protect Canadians against unwanted and nuisance calls. The following measures are being implemented by phone service providers. Traceback process At our request, a telecommunications industry working group developed and deployed a call traceback process. The objective is to identify the origin of unwanted calls on the Canadian network, regardless of the type of technology used by the caller. The end goal is to enforce the Unsolicited Telecommunications Rules by enabling corrective action to be taken at, or close to, the source of such calls. Caller ID authentication and verification measure We directed telecommunications service providers to implement a framework to authenticate and verify caller identification information for Internet Protocol (IP)-based calls. This framework is called STIR/SHAKEN, which stands for Secure Telephone Identity Revisited/Signature-based Handling of Asserted information using tokens. The STIR/SHAKEN framework enables service providers to certify whether a caller's identity can be trusted by authenticating and verifying the caller ID information for IP-based voice calls. This framework empowers Canadians to determine which calls are authenticated, reducing the frequency and impact of caller ID spoofing. Presently, not all calls received will be authenticated due to a variety of reasons such as: network compatibility calls being not entirely performed over an IP-voice network complex call scenarios and the fact that only smartphones are able to display the STIR/SHAKEN information More Canadians will be able to see the effect of the STIR/SHAKEN framework as service providers continue to: upgrade their network to IP technology, make compatible phones available to their customers improve their capacity to properly authenticate caller IDs We expect STIR/SHAKEN, to partner with the analytical capacity of service providers to effectively protect Canadian consumers against fraudulent automated call systems and other similar nuisance calls. Universal Call Blocking and Call Filtering Phone service providers that are not already offering an opt-in call filtering system are required to block all calls with caller IDs that: exceed 15 digits, or are not dialable according to the North American Numbering Plan (For example, calls from the number "999-999-9999" would be blocked before reaching the subscriber). The call filtering option, which can be offered as an alternative, should be able to detect suspicious calls and intercept them (either by sending them directly to voicemail or requesting the caller to provide an input on their phone keypad to reach the customer). Industry Initiative On December 9, 2021, we approved Bell Canada's application to deploy its new call-blocking technology. The call-blocking system leverages artificial intelligence to analyze telemarketers who make calls to accurately identify themselves at their client. 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