



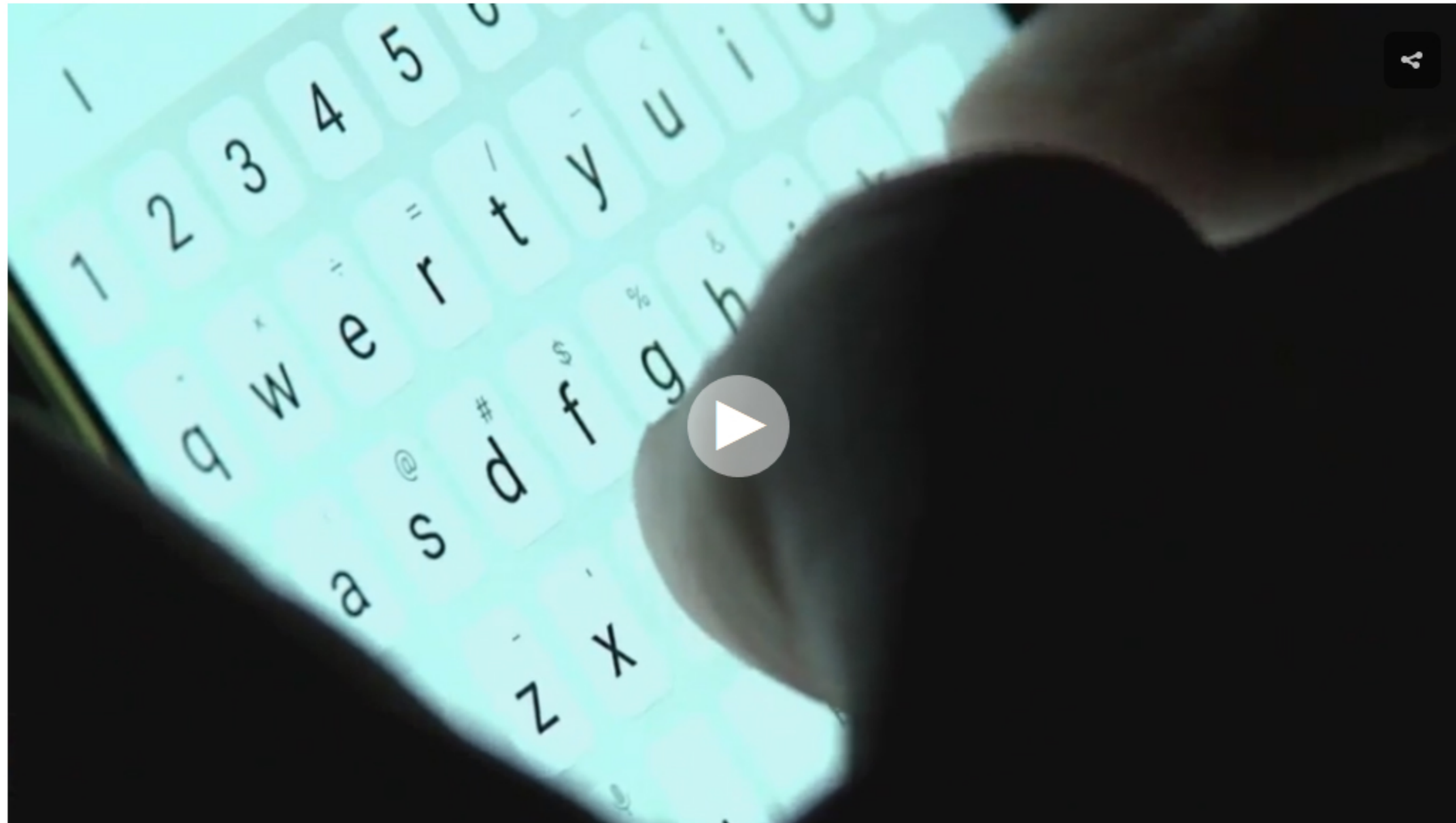
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What criminals can do after stealing your cell phone number

by Brian Pia, ABC 33/40 News iTeam Investigator | Monday, October 23rd 2017



Last year, criminals gained control of 161,000 consumer mobile accounts — a 92 percent increase over the year before.

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Zak Jones has been using mobile phones for years. He's amazed that cell phone number ID theft is so widespread.

"Actually, that is pretty shocking," Jones told the ABC 33/40 News iTeam. "You wouldn't think that would actually happen to you."

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Cell phone number ID theft on the rise

Phone number identify theft is a big problem. Last year, criminals gained control of 161,000 consumer mobile accounts — a 92 percent increase over the year before. That's according to [Javelin Strategy & Research](#)—a financial institution advisory firm.

Security experts say criminals can steal your cell phone number thorough data breaches, social media posts, or apps — and they can use it to set up a new cell phone with that number and send and receive calls and text messages.

If you use your cell phone number to receive authentication texts for social media sites or online banking — criminals can receive those messages and potentially gain access to those accounts.

Joseph Steinberg is a cybersecurity expert and CEO of a company called [Secure My Social](#).

"If you're authenticating to a bank, for example, and the bank sends you a one-time code to your cell phone that you're supposed to enter to prove that it's you, well now a criminal's getting that," Steinberg said.

Your cell phone number is linked to lots of your personal information

Tom Martin, a private investigator and president of [Martin Investigative Services](#) in Newport Beach, California, says a person's cell phone number can be used to gain access to that person's name, social security number, birth date, current and past addresses, home sales price, mortgage amount, driver's license number and vehicle identification number, among other important details.

Sabrina Waldheim is very protective of her cell phone number—given all the risks.

"I just don't trust a lot of people with my cell phone number," Waldheim said.

Marvin Martin protects his cell phone number too.

"I just don't like the thought of my cell phone number being out there for just everybody to see," Martin said.

How to protect yourself

Steinberg has some advice to protect yourself:





- Don't share your mobile number on social media.
- Use strong passwords. One example: Separate three unrelated, but memorable words with numbers. One of those words could be in a foreign language.
- Create a password to make changes to your mobile account.
- Call your mobile phone company if your phone switches to "emergency call service only." That's what happens when your phone number has been transferred to another phone.
- Don't click on links from random emails or texts. They could contain malware.

Here's the bottom line: Criminals are very sophisticated and cell phone numbers are linked to your personal information.

Experts say treat your cell phone number like your social security number.

Guard it. Protect it.

TRENDING

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1 Rainbow City man killed in single-vehicle crash 
- 11 HOURS AGO
2 Utah mother, wanted for murder of 13-day-old son, arrested in Georgia 
- AN HOUR AGO
3 Oklahoma sheriff: 13-year-old in custody for killing 10-year-old with crossbow 
- 2 HOURS AGO
4 Woman accused of tying plastic bag over 2-year-old daughter's head 
- 12 HOURS AGO
5 Target says customers want it to pause the 'Christmas creep' 