



Travel warning: Do not use public Wi-Fi in airports, hotels

Hackers' 'Pineapple' device targeting your data

Central Florida residents set for those final summer vacations should switch to their smart phone data plans to avoid being hacked by high-tech thieves in hotels, airports, coffee shops and any other locations that provides public Wi-Fi.

Kirstin Hoyt, dean of information systems and technology at the University of Phoenix, told News 6 that hackers are known to use so-called “Pineapple devices” to “listen” to consumer smart phones linked to public Wi-Fi networks.

“For us, it’s ‘they’re attacking me personally,’ but for them, they’re digging for data,” Hoyt said.

Hoyt, who teaches cyber security classes at the University of Phoenix, said TSA employees who attend her class confirmed seeing the pineapple devices during airport security screening.

The devices are usually square with dual antenna that look very similar to hot spot or virtual personal network (VPN) devices.

News 6 found several models on the internet available for about \$100, and according to Hoyt, that low-cost technology grants access to every device on a public Wi-Fi network.

“If I’m connected to a public Wi-Fi network I’m one of hundreds of people that could be on that network,” she said.

Hoyt told News 6 that a key defense against hackers is a 13-character password instead of the standard eight characters.



Think of it as a delay tactic.

“An eight-character password takes about a half hour to hack into,” Hoyt said, “whereas a 13-character password can take up to two days.”

Hoyt said that delay could frustrate data hackers to the point where they might give up.

Hoyt also said consumers should turn off Wi-Fi or Bluetooth while traveling, get a VPN and remember to switch to a 13-character password and change passwords frequently because, according to Hoyt, “that’s your biggest defense.”

“They’re looking for information, that’s why they target big corporate customers,” Hoyt said. “They target health care, they target retail, they’re looking for data and any data that’s going to make them money.”

As for social media security, Hoyt said the University’s cyber security survey conducted this summer found that 64 percent of adults had their social media accounts hacked in 2016.

Hoyt told News 6 the biggest mistake consumers can make is to post vacation photos while on vacation.

“Your address and personal information is easily found on Facebook. People post way too much information on social media,” Hoyt said.

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