

Ever Lost Your Phone?

I recently did. I have a detailed, and painful (for me) story about recovery of data and what I learned to do, and not to do. I lost my cellphone on December 15, 2016, a day that will live in infamy for me. I thought I was safe and could easily recover lost phone numbers and the rest of the data on my phone. Well I was half right...

The half of the story I got correct was the security stuff. I had done these things:

1. Connected my cellphone to my Gmail account, and enabled "Find My Phone"
2. Used a long, complex password on the phone
3. Set the screen timeout to 1 minute, and a single press on the power button locked it
4. Used the "Encrypt my Phone" option

As soon as I discovered I could not find my phone, I immediately logged on to my Gmail account and used the "Find My Phone" feature.

Side Note: Google's "Find My Phone" is a fun thing to do. I recommend it if you have an Android Phone. (Apple has one too, via iCloud). Because I always keep the ringer off so as not to disturb clients, simply calling it won't help – it's silent. When using this feature, it puts the speaker on full volume, and uses a loud sound almost like a Police Siren. Kind of cool. Great for scaring the daylights out of unsuspecting family members.

Back to the story: "Find My Phone" displayed a map showing that whomever had it was already a good 5 miles away from the rest stop I was in. So, in the hope that person might be honest, I used the "Send Lost Phone Message" feature. That feature will display a nice message on the home screen with a request to please call a secondary phone number of your choosing to arrange a return. Well, I gave them half an hour to respond, but they did not call me back.

The next step was to use the "**Wipe My Device**" option. This step hurt, because I knew there were photos on the phone that I did not back up yet. But it was one extra step to prevent anyone from accessing or ever using my phone, and it essentially turned my phone into a paperweight. So I did it, and in less than an hour from disappearance, my phone was wiped, and a useless brick. If the thief took out the SD card, it was encrypted, so it was also useless. I felt pretty good about all that.

Now the painful part: I did not get all my contacts and phone numbers back, and I lost most of my photos. Why? Because I had disabled backing up phone stuff to my Gmail account... DUH! When I did connect it, I found less than half the phone numbers had been backed up, and almost none of the photos. Ouch.

Overall, re-entering the contacts was a bit of a pain, but I felt very good that no one would be able to see my data and very glad I used the "Find My Phone" feature. I felt a bit sheepish about not backing up my phone, and upon receiving my new one, I made sure all the backup options were enabled.

-John Becker