The nation’s cellphone networks could suffer “potentially catastrophic” cyberattacks by iPhone-wielding hackers at home and abroad if iPhone owners are permitted to legally jailbreak their shiny wireless devices — that’s what Apple claims.
A jailbroken iPhone is a weapon of mass disruption, Apple claims. The Copyright Office is considering a request by the Electronic Frontier Foundation to legalize the widespread practice of jailbreaking, in which iPhone owners hack their devices to accept software that hasn’t been approved for distribution through the iPhone App Store. Apple made the claim in comments filed last week (.pdf) with the agency.

The company’s filing explained that jailbreaking could allow hackers to altering the iPhone’s BBP — the “baseband processor” software, which enables a connection to cell phone towers. By tinkering with this code, “a local or international hacker could potentially initiate commands (such as a denial of service attack) that could crash the tower software, rendering the tower entirely inoperable to process calls or transmit data,” Apple wrote the government. “Taking control of the BBP software would be much the equivalent of getting inside the firewall of a corporate computer — to potentially catastrophic result.

“The technological protection measures were designed into the iPhone precisely to prevent these kinds of pernicious activities, and if granted, the jailbreaking exemption would open the door to them,” Apple added.

Threat Level had no idea the iPhone was so dangerous. We’re gratified that Apple locked down this potential weapon of mass disruption before hackers could unleash cybarmageddon. This also explains why Apple rejected the official Google Voice App for the iPhone this week. We thought it was because Google Voice posed a threat to AT&T’s exclusivity deal with Apple. Now we know it threatened national security.

At stake for Apple is the closed business model it has enjoyed since 2007, when the iPhone debuted. More than 30 million phones have been sold. Apple has told the Copyright Office that its locked-down platform is what made the iPhone’s success possible.
The EFF has asked the regulators for the DMCA exemption, (.pdf) which would allow consumers to run any app on the phone, including those not authorized by Apple. Fred von Lohmann, the EFF attorney who made the request, said Apple’s latest claims are preposterous. During a May public hearing on the issue in Palo Alto, California, he told regulators there were as many as a million unauthorized, jailbroken phones. In an interview Tuesday, he said he suspected those phones have not been used to destroy mobile phone towers. “As far as I know, nothing like that has ever happened,” he said. He added that, if Apple’s argument was correct, the open-source Android phone from Google on T-Mobile networks would also be a menace to society. “This kind of theoretical threat,” von Lohmann said, “is more FUD than truth.”

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 says “no person shall circumvent a technological measure that effectively controls access to a work protected under this title.” But under the law, every three years the Librarian of Congress and the Copyright Office must consider the public’s requests for exemptions to that anti-circumvention language. Apple also claimed that jailbreaking would pave the way for hackers to alter the Exclusive Chip Identification number that identified the phone to the cell tower, which could enable calls to be made anonymously. Apple said “this would be desirable to drug dealers.”

Photo courtesy Patrick H. Lauke

See Also:
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Tags: hacking, iphone, jailbreaking

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Hope you guys do just as well this year!

i love iphone. i see jailbreaking as excuse for illegally download paid apps, for free. but come onnnn! would anybody who wants to use iphone to hack cell towers bother if jailbreaking is illegal or not? dont need iphone to do dat anyway. most mobile phones works just fine.

APPLE COMPUTERS

Jailbreaking your phone today. Hacking the Gibson and peddling crank tomorrow.

it's very nice and amazing project.

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How can jailbreaking possibly crash at&t towers?

How to Unlock Cell Phones

Smok3r2000

So then if this is the big concern and reason why iphones shouldn't be jailbroken then what dumba** reason will they come up with to prevent jailbreaking of ipod touches?? It'll crash major online servers? LOL give me a break they're obviously sour about monetary loss not the "security" of cell towers.

ekardelen133

Hey you brainwashed MORON saç ekimi it already does and has for a LONG time. You cons dont really care about wealth being re-distributed as long as it is re-distributed UP. This countries economy is all ABOUT public cost and private profit. Risks are privatized and profits privatized every day. You dont care. Its only when the needy are benifitting from the redistribution that you get all outraged. You are hypocrites and you are stupid. Its always the same with you guys. ANYTHING for the priveleged but take a dime out of a rich mans pocket to help those in need and you come out of your trailers to snivel and whine on cue like the brainwashed chatty Kathy dolls you are

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saç ekimi saç ekimi

Kaziko86

Ok here's the deal, I work for a cell phone tower company in Northeast Florida. Every cell tower has multiple firewalls and by multiple I'm talking they have around 10 firewalls per tower. Having worked on these systems for several years I can say the posibility of someone "hacking" into a tower is impossible. A hacker with a laptop plugged right into the mainframe of a tower wouldn't even begin to be able to hack these highly secured rigs, let alone some Joe
blow with a jailbroken iPhone or any phone to that matter. Once you take away the sugar-coating from Apple you begin to understand their motive. Think about when you were a kid and you broke the rules, how many time can you remember your parents feeding you some bogus line to try to suade you in another direction. Well that's what apple is trying to do here, they can't figure out a way for us to stop breaking their rules so they are coming up with whatever they can to try to thwart the jailbreaking community. It's just like our so call land of the free, strip the sugarcoating and the U.S. Is really just a communist country with it's own agenda. Steve Jobs is like a politician in disguise. Only looking out for the best interest of his company, and not the consumers which are the backbone of his company. I never understood why so many company's follow this business ethic but that's not for me to understand

So because the majority of people are stupid and jailbreak their phones, the small minority who don't must suffer. It's too bad the hackers are ahead of the programmers. I don't jailbreak, I don't steal music (since iTunes). As I read these posts, I am amazed by the 99% of people who think that "just because they can do something", they should do it. Where is the self restrain and the common sense. does it occur that when they push these phones beyond what at&t can handle now, they are only causing the problem they are trying to avoid. I know people who work at the Apple stores and jailbreak the phones. That's just wrong, and Apple should make a real example of these people.

Pure unadulterated Cor-pirate propaganda!

People already jailbreak their iphones. If someone wanted to crash a cellphone tower, or do all the other nonsense Apple is afraid of, they could have by now. And yet we're all still alive, making phone calls and going about our daily lives. This seems to me like a huge load of BS.
What a load of bollocks.

If Apple was a half-decent company they would offer the iPhone with a larger range of mobile phone service providers!

I would never buy an iPhone in the UK because 02, the service provider, has a crap reception in the areas where I live.

Long live the BlackBerry!

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**anaglyph**

This is the dumbest tech waffle I've heard come from anyone outside a government department. Apple doesn't want people to hack its phone, that's certain, but this faux concern for 'national security' is laughable. Anaglyph's Law: When you run out of proper strategy, and desperation is all you've got, play the Fear card.

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**rdwilker...**

Umm guys, they are not talking about a computer virus. The baseband processor is the controller for the wireless radio. If tweaked it CAN be used to change frequency patterns in a way that can interfere with wireless service. The iPhone is a full computer, capable of being infected with a virus or trojan just like your home PC. Yes, even Mac's and Linux can be compromised. I know, I'm a security engineer. Everybody knows that "all phones have baseband processors, and all phones could be compromised. The difference is the extent to which a device like this CAN be compromised, and the sheer volume of interruption an attack like this could scale too. The network they are talking about is a major portion of the communications infrastructure. Don't take it so lightly that this could happen. I personally believe the iPhone should be recalled until this hole can be plugged. And before all you wannabe's jump in and say "anything can be hacked" Try and find anyone on the internet that has actually cracked a system requiring both two factor auth (something you know and something you have[or 'are']). I know it technically can be, but find anyone who has actually done it. Let me know when you get tired. Increased difficulty in accomplishment = decreased reward = reduced risk. It is a device connecting to a privately held network, they deserve the right to deny modification of the product. Now if they would just implement REAL security to protect the darn thing from modification.

BIGGER POINT:
Even without all the REAL LIFE TECHNICAL STUFF, I agree with the lawyer from earlier. They spent a lot of money developing the damn thing, who the hell are you to demand they give up that revenue that THEY WORKED FOR?

@ ayemahnuhrd:

Excellent points, but wouldn't it be refreshing if companies actually admitted they are protecting their business (nothing wrong with that) rather than trying to look altruistic with some dubious story about national security.

All mobile phone use constitutes some kind of contract with the manufacturer and service provider. There shouldn't be anything wrong with enforcing such contracts where necessary, proving (and this is the tricky bit) it doesn't turn into another "Metallica vs 12yo Napster user," so why dress it up as something more noble?

Wow! iphones must be pretty special if they are capable of such a thing. Or could you do it with a Blackberry or Nokia too if the manufacturer wanted to scare people enough?

If this is true, then Apple should be mandated to remove this potential use at the hardware end rather than using only DRM to prevent it. These things always get hacked - Apple should have known that from the start.

If Apple are correct about this potential use of their product, then it is grossly irresponsible of them to produce it at all and it is further irresponsible to alert every hacker and cyber-terrorist to what they might be able to do with it. If they're serious, then they should recall every iPhone rather than just protecting their monopoly on iPhone software.

Of course if we all crash the cell towers with our jailbroken iphones then the dealers won't be able to make anonymous phone calls with theirs. Take that you drug hawking undesirable.
I did read all of the comments, which is what amused me enough to post. The comments, primarily, consisted of 1) sarcasm 2) disbelief of apple's facts with no evidence 3) reflexive anger. My point is that emotional responses and sarcasm are a teenager's way of expressing themselves and give apple the company no compelling reason to change. My point is that to make a publically traded company run by executives entrusted with the maintaining of stock value for their shareholders change its strategy, you need to address their concerns with reasons not infantile rage that you can't get what you want. If apple didn't oppose cracking their system to install voip, I guarantee ATT would sue them for breach of contract, because it hurts ATT's cellphone business. If they allowed unstable os's to interfere with ATT's cell towers (they aren't public folks, they are a privately owned network, so they aren't yours) that would be grounds for termination of the executives who decided that. I don't really have a dog in the fight, I don't care. I just get annoyed with nerd-rage against corporations by instinct. If you are truly nerds, you can summon the research and reading abilities to present an argument apple may consider, such as how it will make more revenue, expand its market share, etc., not simply spewing bile that apple is not making a decision that is against its corporate self-interest in every way.

who needs an Iphone.
Just cut off the electricity

This is retarded...if it's true, then legality of jailbreaking is not going to mean anything to hackers. This is just a way for apple to attempt to control the app-market outright.

@ayemahnuhrd - did you even read any of the comments, or did you just skim them for the capitalized posts? alot of people have made valid points that deserve more than your pitiful attempts to troll them.
that being said, anything has always been possible. if someone really wanted to, right now, they could probably get a nuclear weapon into the white house. no security system is foolproof. the best you can do is deter honest people, and block enough of the serious holes that it isn't worth the effort to go after. the way i understand it, security for such things as cell towers should work at the tower level, not at the phone level. people's computers aren't restricted to how they can access the internet, and for good reason. the security should be server side. putting in client side restrictions is lazy, and it's just asking for trouble. and also from what i understand, there is already pretty heavy security on the US cellular network. if i saw a proof of concept of this, i'd be a bit more scared. but again, as has been stated above, there are a lot more easy ways to disrupt cellular communications.

**tim1**

Maybe you can update the radio firmware on most modern phones. But how many people are doing that on their Windows Mobile? 23? 37?

The problem is: With jailbreak suddenly millions of phones with modified firmware are out there. If the jailbreak developers wanted to, they could run a pretty effective, decentralized attack onto the cell network..

**wiredreader2009**

you can change the imei/esn/network id on almost every phone sold in the usa... not to mention that you can update the radio firmware on every windows mobile and most other modern phones and data cards that also connect to the cell network... do they really think anyone believes them?

**tim1**

I'm impressed how many people call this BS and make it a political thing without apparently knowing anything about the technical background.

Every new phone model has to undergo a strict verification process to eliminate chances that the baseband processor harms the networks. Now if the firmware in a jailbroken phone is harmfully modified, this integrity can't be guaranteed anymore.
If millions of people install a jailbroken OS on their phone, and this OS contains malicious code that could be activated remotely, e.g. through a push msg or by a timer, then every jailbroken iPhone could play it's part to initiate a denial of service attack against the tower software.

There is no reason why Apple shouldn't be better safe than sorry and should have a lot against legalizing jailbreaking!

If they really believe this they should do all they can to stop people doing this kind of tinkering... by unlocking the devices for everyone, then the masses won't need to jailbreak to get what they want, and there will be fewer phones which could cause this kind of problem.

Apple is the terrorist here - just like other terrorists in the world, "they hate our freedom" !!

If you are willing to hack your iPhone to deliberately crash cell towers I doubt you are going to worry about hacking your own phone. Apple is evil. I won't buy anything from them until Jobs is gone and the company purges the evil from their ranks. At least Bill Gates gives huge amounts to charity.

Apple is starting to sound like Microsoft of the 90's with their lame 'technical' excuses for not allowing PC manufacturers to uninstall Internet Explorer.

There are no such catastrophic threats to security. The only threat is to Apple business model.

If it were so easy to break down a cellular system by sending "commands" we would have seen a lot of those already. The cellular system also has its security system and just because one phone is sending "commands" it will get crazy.
Now, if we suppose for a minute that it is true that an unauthorized application can access and manipulate the iPhone baseband processor, then there is a HUGE design problem... basically the iPhone has been developed without any security consideration at all.

**fallen_prisoner**

i like your comment zorc3. sounds reasonable. again the "users" that want to cause problems are going to cause them whether these acts are tagged illegal or not. EULAs are becoming less and less about leaving the company at no fault for uncovered use and more about blaming the user if they tinker with what they have purchased.

**ce Bundy**

My son jail broke his phone and after adding a relatively few apps could no longer access the internet via Safari. After reinstalling, he was back up and running.

I have worked in software for many years. The advantage of a "Closed" system is that the applications are more apt to work correctly with each other.

Personally give a choice of being able to install anyone's app on my phone, or ensure it that the large number of features and apps work seamlessly, I would choose a closed system on my phone any time.

I have a computer that I can run other kinds of stuff on. My phone needs to work.

**josh482**

so someone with a burning desire to deal drugs or crash cell towers is gonna be defeated because jailbreaking their phone is illegal?

**ayemahnuhrd**

I would love for all posters to identify their ages (i'm 30) because these posts are hilarious and seem to reek of teenage angst. To start, the article itself is so poorly researched that it never even bothered to check any unbiased authority to see whether apple's claims are true
(asking the opposing party's attorney is not enough there Lauke, what do you expect him to say?) I just finished reading WIRED'S OWN ARTICLE on how two noted security professionals got hacked, so I'm in a mood to think anything's possible in tech land. Why does everyone think this isn't possible? The general tone of the comments is that any restriction whatsoever on anything they want to do in any context with any device and any software is bad. There's no arguing with people like that. Nor do they have any point to make - they are just MAD about the DCMA and copyright laws and laws in general and existence and they want everything they want right away and why don't corporations pay programmers to make me free games and can't everyone have a pony. Apple, on the other hand, has ALWAYS been a strict follower and enforcer of copyright, DRM, patents, their own business partners, their shareholders, and their own self-interest. Why throw tantrums about it? That's the way the world works. No corporation is going to give up legal competitive advantage, losing app sales and pissing off the network carrier it has a contract with just to make you nerds happy (and you, I guess, are a tiny tiny minority). They'd get sued by shareholders, their directors would get sacked, they would probably lose money and they may go out of business. You may as well tell pepsi to start giving you free cans of soda as a business model because it would make people like them better. You can do it, but people will think you are crazy. I think you all are crazy.

(oh and nobody's making jailbreaking illegal. it IS illegal under the DCMA. Thus the request for an EXCEPTION. Disclosure: I'm also a lawyer)

@alchemistmuffin: Everybody knows this is true, but everyone also knows that fires can burn a forest, so let's make matches illegal. The point is this is just another argument to try to maintain exclusivity. Making it illegal would not stop a terrorist, guaranteed. It would just ensure apple/at&t get what they want which is $$$$.

I want to say this is BS, but this is actually true.

And this threat, is not limited to just iPhone, IT'S ALL PHONES!

Trust me, even a RAZR can bring down the mobile tower, if the hackers know the OS very well. This is actually a legitimate threat. iPhone OS is even more powerful, and therefore more vulnerable to these type of things. Even Palm's new WebOS can be used to hack into cell
towers, and boom, disaster. Same with Blackberry OS. A Blackberry storm, T-Mobile G1, a Nokia phones, all phones, can be used to take down a cell signals.

This hasn't happened yet. But something that all cell phone manufacture has to worry about. iPhone OS is just more popular operating system, just like Windows, back in the day. This is why iPhone OS is more vulnerable to these type of attacks.

I like jailbreak, but sadly, now it's used in the wrong way, like Pirating apps, and now potentially, this.

@baccaruda

That was exactly my thought when I read it. The people who want to crash a cell tower are not exactly going to be worried about the legality of jailbreaking. Talk about a shell game!

inthescherter

Big Apple fan here. My family has several Macs, several iPods and several iPhones that we love. That being said, Apple's reply is utter nonsense. If all they could come up with to refute jailbreaking is this steaming pile of an excuse then they should have not replied at all. This should end up as a slam dunk for the EFF's case if this is the extent of Apple's reply.

sirtristane

...What possible justification can you morons give for publishing this article? This is one of the most popular blogs on the net. If a hacker reads this, what the hell do you think he/she is going to do? EXACTLY WHAT YOU JUST DESCRIBED.

Geez, its almost as bad as the normal media doing stories about how our southern border is easily bypassed, and how TSA agents can't catch certain materials that can be used to make deadly bombs on planes. Are you people ASKING the bad guys to do evil stuff? Because it sure seems like it!

That said, I have a simple solution. All the investigators would have to do to find the perpetrator of such an attack is look for people that post things about how they hate
Apple/AT&T, and that'll be the guy. Also, maybe forcing AT&T to build a network that doesn't suck fat hairy balls would alleviate the threat.

**Gover**

You know an even better way to crash cell phone towers?

DYNAMITE

**minelp**

Breaking news! Apple now claims that "Jailbroken iPhones could allow MMS messaging to be utilize, which in turn would allow kidnappers to send pictures of victims to their families as ransom notes."

God bless Apple. They are only thinking of our protection!

**blissfulight**

Maybe the solution is to build a better network. Maybe the solution is to accept that everything is vulnerable. Maybe the solution is to build a more open platform. Maybe the solution is to put in a removable battery.

**blissfulight**

Hardeharhar. I need a "license" from the feds to jailbreak my iPhone? Ahh, yeah, right. Legal or not, my iPhone will be jailbroken unless and until Stevie offers all the goodies that he keeps denying the citizens of Appleland. It's a rebellion, I tell ya.

**piddlyd**

Now... pay attention fellow ubergeeks, because this is a shell game. The distraction will occur when legislators and government actually listen to and *follow* Apple's advice and uphold
that it is a grievous violation of the DMCA to jailbreak an iPhone. We'll scream about what morons they are, how technically illiterate these gray-haired lawmakers are. But we'll be wrong. They're only concerned with the fact that the general public accepts the excuse given, when in fact, both parties, the company and the government, understand that this is all about catering to business desires and not giving a shit about consumer needs or rights. The digital TV transition and BluRay are not about giving you more options or higher quality products - they're about giving media and content distribution channels more control over your entertainment experience. This is more of the same. Welcome to "Have it OUR way" technology.

Firstly, I would never buy an iPhone I like the hardware, but I find this form of control very offensive, the fact that they are trying to do this is enough to piss me off, I would be demanding a refund

And secondly, who is going to be caught using a jailbroken phone, I hope the first person who gets arrested over this goes straight to the media and humiliate Apple

This is wasting time for law makers for addressing real problems, and honestly, I didn't think Steve Jobs was such a bully until the iPhone came out

Instead of attacking the towers with a DoS attack, it would be much easier to create a radio jammer

@JRosen "until the gov't gets it's own head out of it's ass and stops letting corporations tell it what to do,"
.
.
How about Gov't gets it's hand (up to the elbow) out of Corporations ass, and stop telling THEM what to do!
as stated earlier, the idea that it's illegal to hack the phone and that is stopping illegal activity is a ludicrous argument. I wish they would put a little more effort into the creation of the "party line"

**mrbofus**

This is ridiculous; by that argument, we shouldn't be allowed to install non-Apple approved software on our Macs either because there's the potential for someone, somewhere, to do something malicious.

**zore3**

Clearly it's been demonstrated that the iphone is capable of being jailbroken. If it's true that jailbroken device could cause all this harm then shouldn't it be pulled from the market until it can be made safe?

**baccaruda**

When crashing cellphone towers is outlawed, only outlaws will crash cellphone towers. Apple is full of it; People who want to crash cellphone towers don't care if it's illegal or not.

**srojo**

This is utter hogwash coming from $AAPL, mostly to cover for their security shortcomings in an unjailbroken iPhone [root or mobile: alpine, anyone?], as well as the shortcomings of ATT.

Yes, there are shysters in the jailbreak community [like 'Hackulous'] -- but they are well known and avoided because it's a vibrant and open community.

I think there are far more in the so-called 'AppStore' that crank out scores of 'crApps' that fart, speed dial, and do other useless things. Most of these are one-off Apps because Devs cannot maintain their apps because....

As we can all read, Apple is having growing pains with their AppStore. Their folks are 'overworked'. What this really means is that the exec above them doesn't have a proper
system in place. What has resulted is a lot of shovelware and games on one end, and a lot of
good stale apps as Devs move to more open platforms or more likely put more time into ones
that don't have a 2+ week waiting period. What does this landscape remind me of?

These 'crApps' [as I call them] remind me a lot of what is pitched to end users in the
Windows world. Good but stale, or one-off little VB binaries that may do other things and not
tell the user.

A more viable scenario is this: crApp gets approved by the AppStore by overworked reviewer,
1000s pick it up for free-- of course there's a little payload inside -- and those Unix-based
iPhones become a botnet to attack web sites, cell towers, etc. All from the world's most
powerful UNIX based platform that Apple doesn't want you to modify. Because of their own
shortcomings.

What does the end user think? 'Oh, my iPhone has slowed down'.

Earth to $AAPL: Never send a sales vp to do a geek's job.

---

encarlisle

Apple and ATT must have worked hard to come up with PILE of BS that big. If ATT provided
even reasonable service there wouldn't be this problem, ATT wouldn't release to me a
hardcopy of dropped calls for the month. At the apple store the "genius" wouldn't give me a
hard copy either but told me it was 38% for the month and it was unknown how many calls
were completely missed, this is on a business class contract $200 a month for unlimited
failure. The cellphone companies have made huge campaign contributions to ensure they are
fire proof the only one thats gets burned is US!! Jail break until they provide service !

---

Blenvid

I just KNEW there was going to be some good comments with this article. LMAO! These are
classics.

"by bypassing our iphone software YOU ARE WITH THE TERRORISTS"

"So, terrorist don't destroy infrastructure... open iPhones do?"

LMAO!
Well I guess they needed some defense, and crashing a network is a pretty big allegation. But still. Seriously? "Weak" is what comes to mind...

If Apple and greedy/evil at&t would open up the damn iPhone, I can almost guarantee the number of people trying to jailbreak the device will drop to under 50%. Less interest into unlocking the phone => less interest to support the hacking community.

Bottom line, I think the answer is pretty obvious: give people the opportunity to buy unlocked phones or you evil at&t unlock people's phones after the 2 year contract runs out!

Hey, you don't know how lucky you are Apple allows you to give them money and use their phones. So stop your whining and do as Jobs says.

Mithras' logic is spot-on, clone53421 solution is the <del>right</del> only one

They argue that the laws are needed to protect the towers, but the people they are trying to protect them from, by definition, are already not respectful of laws in general, ergo, the law does nothing.

All this new proposition would do is put federal resources into the position of protecting a private network. Why install a high quality digital security when you can use the FBI and federal courts to squash would-be hackers before they actually do anything? Well because a secure network is actually secure, whereas imprisoning all hackers with this intention is surely a fools errand

rembo666
The funniest part of this "grim warning" is that there are plenty of smartphones on the market with a sufficiently open architecture that already allow the users to do what the iPhone users have to jailbreak for in the first place. I guess they just aren't stylish enough for hackers and terrorists...

**gibbypoo**

Terrorist here,

I'm enjoying my customized home screen on my radically terror-inducing jailbroken iPhone. Viva la resistance!

**LandShark**

I wonder what's so good about this phone that so many people is willing to go along with Apple's epic BS. You don't need to jailbreak an iPhone if you want to take a cell tower down; if you're serious about it you can just blow the thing off.

All this coming from the company that ran a "1984" commercial once. Talk about irony.

**JRosen**

And obviously corporate idiocy abounds... Has for years, and will for years more until the gov't gets it's own head out of it's ass and stops letting corporations tell it what to do.