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## Is Apple's iMessage Service Really Uncrackable By Law Enforcement?

By: Tim Worstall – April 5, 2013

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There's a story going around that Apple's iMessage service might be immune from any form of the police managing to intercept or read messages. I don't think this can quite be true and Julian Sanchez over at Cato has shown the reason why this cannot be true:

If you slip in a mud puddle, destroying your iPhone (along with any locally stored encryption keys) and forgetting your passwords as a result of the bump on the head, can you still recover your data? Can you, for instance, log in from a Web browser, reset your password, and then restore your content to a new device? If you can—and with Apple's iCloud services, you can—then the cloud provider *must* itself hold the keys to unlock that data. So iMessages may not be interceptable from a suspect's cell carrier, but Apple has to be capable of handing them over when the authorities come knocking with a warrant. In fact, all Apple has to do is provide the cops with an appropriate authentication token and they should, in principle, be able to turn an ordinary iPhone into a de facto clone of the suspect's own device—so that iMessages show up on the police phone in realtime just as the suspect receives or sends them.

And Sanchez takes us further by pointing out that traditional SMS messages are often destroyed after only a couple of days on the servers while Apple's iMessages are stored indefinitely at the company.

So, no, iMessage is not the answer to a drug dealer's prayers, a method of communication that is unhackable and untraceable. Indeed, it's of rather more use in analysing the activities of a dealer than other, older, methods would be.

The part of this I'm not sure about though is where Sanchez heads next. He suggests that this misinformation was deliberately released in order to get criminals to use iMessage so that these messages could indeed be read. I'm really not sure that I buy that to be honest. Not for any reason other than that I don't really think of the police and the law enforcement agencies as being quite that cute in their strategic planning.