

GIZMO

gear@sundaytimes.co.uk

Beware the traitor in your pocket

That mobile or MP3 player which seems like your best friend could also be leaking data that allow you to be tracked, warns Mark Harris

In this age of identity theft, financial fraud and terrorism, most of us know that we shouldn't give out our personal details to complete strangers. Yet many of the high-tech items that we carry with us every day may be doing just that – silently broadcasting our nationality, location and identity to anyone who might want to listen. Less than £50 buys a system that can locate someone to within yards. Put a network of detectors together, and you can follow one person or a group as they move through a city. Sounds like the plot of a paranoid thriller, such as *Enemy of the State*? Unfortunately not. The thing that gives

away our location is a low-power radio system called Bluetooth. Virtually all modern mobile phones have Bluetooth to let you use hands-free handsets. Laptops and personal organisers use it to swap files, while some sat navs have Bluetooth installed too. There are even MP3 players that come with wireless Bluetooth headphones. When they set up their Bluetooth identity, many people enter their own name to enable file sharing. Visit www.bluetoothtracking.org today and you can see live data on more than 100,000 people in seven locations in the Netherlands, and even search for individual first names. The site does not publish full Bluetooth phone codes or names, but others may not be so ethical. The (anonymous) author of the site says: "It's amazing how many people put their full name or last name in their phone as a Bluetooth identity." Even if a person doesn't use their own name, a determined tracker can discover with a little ingenuity what code they have chosen and track them with a network of Bluetooth receivers. In researching crowd behaviour, Eamonn O'Neill of Bath University's department of computer science showed how scanners could be used to target groups of pedestrians. He



Just as a Highways Agency worker can monitor road traffic, so anyone with a little know-how can track a Bluetooth device

discovered that about 7.5% of pedestrians in Bath were carrying active Bluetooth phones in 2006, a number that has since increased sharply. "Recently, we've seen an astronomically higher number of Bluetooth devices out there," he says. While all phones allow you to turn

off the Bluetooth functions, other technologies could also be leaking your personal data. You can follow individual mobile-phone handsets for as little as £5 per month (www.traceamobile.co.uk), or sign up to a Facebook application (www.sniffu.com) that can pinpoint

your friends' phones on a digital map. All of these require the permission of the phone's owner, but a determined tracker can get round the safeguards – forgive us for not telling you how. Another technology that allows identification and tracking is RFID. This short-range system is used to

track goods in warehouses, to "chip" pet dogs and to secure the electronic passports that the UK has been issuing since 2006.

However, German researchers recently demonstrated that they could remotely scan the latest e-passports – through a coat or bag, for instance – and determine at least the holder's nationality.

The risks of carrying these telltale gadgets shouldn't be exaggerated. Just because someone can follow phones through a city, or pick UK citizens out of a crowd, doesn't necessarily mean their owners are more likely to suffer a crime. In fact, says O'Neill, it might even be a benefit. "When people are offered good enough location-based services they're going to embrace the technology even if that means giving up small pieces of personal data. Imagine a cafe that offers a discount to passers-by via Bluetooth, or a blue plaque that gives multimedia tourist information."

Or then again, imagine being deluged by non-stop Bluetooth spam as you walk around – a bit like the billboards in the science-fiction film *Minority Report*, that scan your iris as you pass and address you by name.

Ominously, the Information Commissioner's Office has confirmed that unsolicited Bluetooth messages are not covered by current anti-spam regulations. It may only be nipping at our heels at the moment, but be warned, Bluetooth can bite.

SIMPLE SHOOTER

Flip Video Ultra camcorder £99 www.flipvideo.co.uk

Do your home movies really need high-definition video and digital surround sound? This camcorder takes movie-making back to basics, with standard-definition video, mono sound and a small 1.5in screen. Features are sparse: it lacks an optical zoom and even menus. Despite this (maybe because of it), the Flip has taken the US by storm and now accounts for one in eight camcorders sold there. After shooting movies (you can fit about an hour of footage on its 2GB internal memory), you simply plug the Flip into any home computer using its built-in USB jack, and it automatically loads software that lets you view and edit your clips, stitch them into movies, add a soundtrack and e-mail or upload them to websites such as YouTube – in minutes. In brief tests, the Flip Ultra proved extremely easy to use, capturing decent-quality video, although the lack of a zoom did prove annoying. Editing and sharing video was also very straightforward. If you're more serious about your home movies, the high-definition (HD) camcorders InGear tested last week provide a lot more power and flexibility, albeit at far higher prices. Catch up with these tests at Times Online (tinyurl.com/54y4rr). The Flip Ultra arrives in UK stores next Monday.



DOCK SHOCK

Meridian DSP7200 speakers £17,495 a pair www.meridian-audio.com 01480 445 678

What do you give the iPod that has everything? Meridian's shockingly priced new speakers have all the electronics and amplification you need to plug Apple's music player (or any other music source) straight in, making them the world's most expensive iPod dock. Each speaker contains four drivers and four 100W amplifiers, controlled by digital processors that allow you to tweak the sound minutely to suit your taste and the acoustics of the room it is placed in. The speakers also use Meridian's SpeakerLink technology to connect other components using all-digital computer-network cabling. Given that Apple's most expensive music player (the 32GB iPod touch) costs just £329, having to splash out over 50 times that amount for a pair of speakers should limit the Meridian's audience to rock stars and millionaires.



GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

SoWine Bar wine cooler £300 www.eurocave.co.uk 020 7935 4679

Health advice on wine consumption changes almost weekly but here is a gadget to help you enjoy a daily glass without later having to throw away half a bottle of sour plonk. The SoWine Bar uses a vacuum pump to seal an open bottle, preventing further oxidation of the wine. Each of its two compartments is also thermostatically controlled to keep your wine at a constant temperature, ready for drinking (it's factory-set at 9C for white wine and 17C for red). You can store two bottles of red, two of white, or of course, one of each. However, the SoWine isn't ideal for drinkers in a hurry, as it takes about three hours to reach the ideal serving temperature.



GAMES

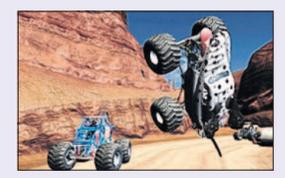


Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures ★★★★★ Most formats, £30-£40. Age to be confirmed

Swing into action as Indiana Jones in a world where the characters and scenery are recreated on-screen as Lego blocks. The game seeks to ensnare whippersnappers, yet there is plenty of challenge for adult Indys to tackle, fedora and bullwhip to the fore.

The plot follows the first three Indy films, so your Lego alter ego must chase after artefacts and fight Nazi enemies, mainly by whipping them until they collapse satisfyingly into Lego pieces. There are more than 60 playable characters, many with different skills, and two people can play co-operatively.

The game offers great value, with huge gaudy landscapes to explore and plenty of secrets to discover. Many film details are cleverly mimicked – Lego blocks build into accessories such as rope ladders to help you escape a collapsing building or cross a ravine. When Indy is forced to hand over a golden trophy, he fobs off his captors with C3PO's head in a nod to *Lego Star Wars*, an earlier hit. Some of the fighting gets monotonous but that's a small cavil for such an imaginative and witty game. A classic. **David Phelan**



Monster Jam ★★★★★ Most formats, £30-£50. All ages

Indulge your more destructive impulses in this monster-truck racing game. Egged on by a full-on rock soundtrack, you must thrash your way through dockyards or mountain tracks, smacking computer-controlled opponents aside and battering any trees and buildings in your path. The game is played at breakneck pace yet still requires surprisingly precise

control to prevent your truck from spinning out and you slipping to the back of the pack. Should this happen, a pile-up among the leaders may well let you sneak past to the front, especially so with judicious use of the game's engine-boost feature. Just take care that your engine doesn't overheat.

The graphics looked detailed on the Xbox 360 version under review and there was no pop-up in evidence (the way distant scenery appears too suddenly). There are more realistic and better-looking racing titles around, many of which have a wider choice of vehicles and more detailed plots, and *Monster Jam* lacks the now bread-and-butter option of online races. Nevertheless, for an uncomplicated dose of adrenaline-pumping road-rage action, it's gentlemen, start your engines. **David Phelan**

★★★★★ KO ★★★★★ A-OK
★★★ OK ★★ So-so ★ No-no

DON'T PANIC

NIGEL POWELL ANSWERS YOUR TECH-RELATED QUERIES

Q Last weekend I lost all my e-mails and addresses from my computer. Can I retrieve them?
Jane Salt, London

A It all depends on what e-mail program you use. If you are running Outlook, it has built-in tools to help repair the .pst file, which is where e-mails and addresses are saved. Incidentally, you should back this file up regularly. See Microsoft's website tinyurl.com/385lbw for more details.

If you are running the free Outlook Express software, this can sometimes be fixed by reinstalling Internet Explorer (details here: tinyurl.com/5u95y). As a last resort, DBXpress (£12.50 from tinyurl.com/2n8hy) can sometimes help retrieve lost e-mail messages.

Q Is there an online storage service you can recommend?
Chris Bartram via e-mail

A Microsoft offers 5GB of free online storage for precious documents via its Windows Live Sky Drive service (see tinyurl.com/4uw7qd) and Google has a similar service. Though features are limited, neither company will disappear in a hurry. A more sophisticated online back-up service that automatically saves changes as you make them on your computer, Xdrive (www.xdrive.com) also offers 5GB free.

The long-established Carbonite application (www.carbonite.com) charges £25 a year for "unlimited" online storage. The main drawback with all online back-up is the slow speed of initially uploading your files. It's wise to back up valuable files to an external hard drive too.

dontpanic@sundaytimes.co.uk