



## Technology

### Taking a bite of the Apple

When a 17-year-old cracked the iPhone, dicey legal questions followed

|Joseph Wilson

Canadians are still squirming with uncertainty over the release date of the iPhone in Canada.

The hotly anticipated phone + iPod + PDA has been on the market since June 29 in the States, and over 1 million have been sold. AT&T hosts the phone on its cellular networks stateside, but no decisions have yet been made for the future of the iPhone north of the border.

Rogers has unofficially announced that it will carry the iPhone on its network, but has only said it might launch it "sometime in the fourth quarter, or early 2008." Perhaps its unwillingness to commit has something to do with security issues and "unlocking" hacks that have recently plagued Apple and AT&T.

On August 24, after 500 hours of solid tinkering, computer whiz George Hotz finally "cracked" the iPhone, allowing it to be used on cellular networks other than AT&T.

Hotz isn't a professional programmer, but a 17-year-old from New Jersey. His was a so-called "hardware hack," which means he took the phone apart and, with some soldering skills and programming savvy, succeeded in rebuilding it for use on the T-Mobile network.

Such a feat has prompted tech companies all over the States to shower Hotz with job offers and gifts. CertiCell, a cellphone repair company in Louisville, Kentucky, got its hands on Hotz's unlocked phone by giving him a "sweet Nissan 350Z and three 8GB iPhones."

Although Hotz's hack marks the most complete display of the iPhone's feeble security, he's not the only one to have messed with the phone's capabilities. Only a few days after the iPhone was released in July, hacking legend Jon Lech Johansson (aka DVD Jon) cracked the iPhone from his home base in Norway.

He then released the software patch through his blog ( <http://nanocr.eu/>), but it only frees up the phone's Web surfing and iPod features, leaving the phone capabilities still locked to AT&T.

Since Hotz completed the unlock and made his methods public, companies have sprung up all over the Internet promising software that unlocks any iPhone. Two of these, iPhone Unlocking Tools and iPhoneSimFree's product, sell for between \$59 and \$99.

In the last few weeks, a hacker calling himself haRRo posed as a member of the iPhone development team and released some fresh unlocking code as a free alternative to the paid hacks now being advertised.

Naturally, AT&T is really pissed off. Last year, company bosses beamed as they announced a five-year contract with Apple to carry the iPhone, amidst assurances from the Apple team that the new phone was safe and secure

from hackers trying to liberate it.

AT&T lawyers have been busy warning purveyors of iPhone cracks to be wary. That said, the law in the States is decidedly unclear. It seems that if consumers want to free their own phones, they have the legal right to do so, according to a recent statement by the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress.

However, if cellphone hackers try to make a profit off their work, it seems Apple and AT&T can pounce.

The fact remains that AT&T still carries the vast majority of iPhone users and will probably continue to do so. For every computer geek who feels his or her freedom of choice is being eroded by a forced contract with AT&T, there are hundreds of hipster business types who couldn't care less who provides the service for their sexy new phone.

In the coming months, we'll see exactly how Rogers plans to deal with the looming problem of unlocked phones, or if it even feels it will be worth the trouble to sell the phone. ☺

[tech@nowtoronto.com](mailto:tech@nowtoronto.com)

