SUMMER 2024 E-NEWSLETTER

At Digital Mountain, we assist our clients with their electronic discovery, digital forensics, cybersecurity, and data analytics needs. For this E-Newsletter, we discuss the digital forensics implications of ephemeral and encrypted messaging data, the rise of two messaging giants, and noteworthy legal developments.

Snapchat and Wickr: You've Come (and Gone) a Long Way

PGP, or Pretty Good Privacy, the first publicly available, free, encrypted email system turned thirty-three years old in June 2024 (https://philzimmermann.com/EN/background/index.html). Perhaps even more than envisioned, Mr. Zimmermann ushered in the age of secure messaging, fighting many of the early battles to allow the legal use of encrypted, and later ephemeral, messaging that we rely on today to ensure our digital communications remain confidential. Now that both encrypted email and ephemeral messaging have reached adulthood, we'll use this article to take a look at how far the first two ephemeral messaging apps, Snapchat and Wickr, have come, and in the case of their disappearing messages, gone.

In 2011, as PGP was celebrating its twentieth birthday, Snapchat, a photo-video sharing application, was released publicly and for the first time, ephemeral technology became available to cell phone users (database management functions included the ability to apply expiration dates to data for years prior). Credited as the first public ephemeral communications, Snaps, the products created by Snapchat, were automatically deleted from the users' devices after viewing. In 2014, Snapchat introduced Chat, what we think of as true ephemeral messaging (text-based, potentially "live" messaging), along with geolocation filters and a payment function. (https://www.thestreet.com/technology/history-of-snapchat#:~:text=Snapchat%20was%20 founded%20in%202011,site%20after%20a%20few%20moments).

For the more serious messaging apps user not concerned with short videos and cat face filters, Wickr was created by law enforcement, government, and defense industry-adjacent developers and introduced in 2012 as "secured using military-grade encryption and never stored," with the "mobile equivalent of a paper shredder," (https://archive.nytimes.com/bits.blogs.nytimes.com /2012/06/27/an-app-that-encrypts-shreds-hashes-and-salts/). Wickr developed various ephemeral messaging products, including a free application for individual users called Wickr Me, which was

shut down 2 years after Amazon Web Services' purchase of the company in 2021. This was following a report that the secure, ephemeral app was a favorite communication tool for those facilitating child predation and illegal drug distribution (https://www.theverge.com/2022/11/19 /23468065/wickr-free-encrypted-messaging-app-shutting-down-amazon-web-services). Still available in various iterations, Wickr offers 5 platforms including a government model, an enterprise model, and Wickr RAM designed for military use (https://wickr.com/downloads/). Interestingly, in 2021, the same year AWS purchased Wickr, the CIA's investment arm, In-Q-Tel, made a $1.6 million dollar investment in Wickr raising the question of what the CIA would have gotten in return from the secure messaging application developer (https://web.archive.org/web/20211013021319/https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3dawk/wickr-cia-funding-inqtel).

There's a host of other ephemeral messaging apps on the market vying for the opportunity to provide superior secure messaging with the added benefit of automatically deleting communications from both the user and sender's devices. To think though, it all started with a guy who just wanted to provide Pretty Good Privacy.

Please direct questions and inquiries about electronic discovery, digital forensics, cybersecurity, and data analytics to info@digitalmountain.com.

UPCOMING INDUSTRY EVENTS

ILTACON 2024
Nashville, TN: August 11-15, 2024

SANS DFIR SUMMIT 2024
Salt Lake City, UT: August 22-23, 2024

THE SEDONA CONFERENCE WORKING GROUP 12 ANNUAL MEETING
Phoenix, AR: September 9-10, 2024

TECHNO SECURITY & DIGITAL FORENSICS CONFERENCE WEST
Pasadena, CA: September 16-18, 2024

MASTERS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 2024
Seattle, WA: September 18, 2024

Click here to see more upcoming events and links.

Digital Mountain, Inc. Founder and CEO, Julie Lewis, will be presenting at various upcoming industry events. Please send requests for speaker or panel participation for her to marketing@digitalmountain.com.

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