Majority Of Registered Voters Overlook Cybersecurity Concerns While On Summer Vacation, According To University Of Phoenix Survey

(NAPSA)—Smartphones have become a bodily extension for most Americans. U.S. World & News Report found that nearly a quarter of the population of the U.S. has a smartphone—fourth in the world. We take our devices with us everywhere—work, home, even on vacation—but the devices in our pockets may be putting us at risk of cybertheft when we least expect it.

According to a survey by the University of Phoenix College of Information Systems and Technology, less than half of registered voters worry about cybersecurity risks while on vacation and 55 percent feel that the need to use personal devices outweighs the risks. Technology experts from the University say vacations are a prime time for hackers to target our personal information through our devices, due to our leniency for cybersecurity best practices.

While summer vacation is often seen as a time to disconnect, three-fourths of respondents say they bring their smartphone with them and half report checking their phone at least once an hour. These actions can put them at risk for data breaches, especially if they are connected to public Wi-Fi. Despite using their devices often, very few people admit to taking measures to prevent hackers from potentially accessing personal information: 54 percent state they lock devices when not in use, but less than half take other precautions such as hiding devices when away (40 percent) or strengthening passwords (24 percent).

"There are myriad ways your personal information can be compromised while you're on vacation," said Dr. Kirsten Hoyt, academic dean, College of Information Systems and Technology at University of Phoenix. "Vacations should be relaxing and fun, but in today's world of connected devices, we always have to be alert."

According to the survey, stolen bank information is the top concern while traveling, selected by more than half of respondents. Other major concerns include losing devices (48 percent) and contracting viruses on devices (44 percent), while a third or less are concerned about hacked e-mail or social media accounts.

You can protect yourself from cyberattacks while traveling.

Hoyt said the best method to prevent our data from being compromised or stolen is to understand how hackers target our information and what they're looking for and take the proper steps to avoid that from happening.

Dr. Hoyt suggests the following practices to stay secure during summer vacation.

- Refrain from posting photos or information about your trip until you return home.
- Update antivirus software and ensure devices are locked with strong passwords when not in use.
- Keep devices close by and lock them in a safe or hide them if you have to leave them in the hotel room.
- Use your phone's hotspot if you need to access public Wi-Fi, and never share personal information on or plug devices into public computers.

The content posted online while traveling can also have implications for your home, according to Dr. Hoyt. She said cyberthieves sometimes monitor social media accounts to know when you are away to break into your home. Hackers who know you're on vacation can also use that information to send phishing e-mails to attempt to trick friends, family members or colleagues into sending money or sharing personal information, if they get access to your account.

"We shouldn't be afraid to travel. In reality, we are probably just as likely to be the target of a cyberattack at home as when we are traveling," she said. "But in today's connected world, we must constantly be aware. Knowing how hackers attack, what they're looking for and how to stop them is your best defense in today's cyberwar."