



# Lost camera phones home to catch thieves

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NEW YORK – Alison DeLauzon thought the snapshots and home videos of her infant son were gone for good when she lost her digital camera while on vacation.

Then a funny thing happened: her camera "phoned home."

Equipped with a special memory card with wireless internet capability, DeLauzon's camera had not only automatically sent her holiday pictures to her computer, but had even uploaded photos of the miscreants who swiped her equipment bag after she accidentally left it behind at a restaurant.

"I opened up the Eye-Fi manager on the computer and, lo and behold, there are the guys that stole our cameras," said DeLauzon, a native of New York's Long Island suburb. "Not only is it the guy who stole our camera ... but the guy took a picture of (his accomplice) holding our other camera."

DeLauzon received the Eye-Fi, a 2-gigabyte SD memory card that fits into millions of digital cameras, as a holiday gift to go with her Canon camera.

Priced at about \$100, the card automatically uploads pictures to a home computer or online photosharing service as soon as the user is linked to a familiar wireless network.

Luckily, the culprits passed by an unsecured network, whose factory-installed setting matched that of DeLauzon's home system, and the Eye-Fi automatically shipped the photos: first baby pictures, then the snap-happy scoundrels.

Her experience reflects the rise of technology that empowers everyday gadgets to protect themselves or the priceless personal data – from family phone numbers to business budgets – that consumers keep on portable electronics devices.

## Macs email video to victims

Cameras are perhaps the most common home-phoning gadget used to thwart criminals.

An eerie case occurred last month, when a Japanese man set up a hidden camera because food was disappearing from his kitchen. While he was out, the camera sent pictures to his mobile phone of the intruder – an unknown woman living secretly in his closet.

A few years ago, there was a well-publicised case of a Sidekick mobile phone that was first lost in a New York taxi, then found by a 16-year-old who used it to take pictures and send instant messages.

But the device's mobile service provider automatically backed up such data on remote computers, allowing the owner's friend, Evan Guttman, to uncover a trail – and launch an online shaming campaign against the 16-year-old, who was eventually arrested.

While passive systems have helped reunite missing gadgets with their owners, more aggressive measures can be employed to protect everything from laptops to iPods and BlackBerrys.

GadgetTrak, of Beaverton, Oregon, sells software that can be loaded onto any of those devices. If a BlackBerry, for example, falls into the wrong hands, the software grabs information from the new user's SIM data card and emails it to the rightful owner.

With an Apple Mac computer, the software instructs the built-in camera to take video of the thief and sends to the owner, along information about



Stolen cameras, phones and gadgets are getting clever than most of the thieves that nick them.

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take video of the thief and sends to the owner, along information about nearby wireless networks.

Some 20,000 GadgetTrak licenses have been purchased in about one year – including 10,000 from storage company Seagate.

"The reason we have been so successful is that people are not expecting this kind of software to be installed," said Ken Westin, the company's founder. "No security solution is 100 per cent – there are always going to be work-arounds. But your average thief is not going to be a computer expert."

DeLauzon didn't want to press charges against the people who had her camera: Both were employees at the restaurant where she dined and accidentally left her photo equipment.

Sure, they were fired – but getting justice was not as important to her as retrieving her memories of her baby boy.

"When we finally got it back, my husband and I spent the night just sitting and watching the videos – stupid videos, like him feeding himself for the first time or him pulling himself up in his crib for the first time. We sat down one night and just relished it."

– REUTERS

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