55% of mobile devices using unprotected Wi-Fi networks

MOSCOW, RUSSIA: The data on most mobile devices could easily fall into the hands of cybercriminals. That's the alarming conclusion reached by Kaspersky Lab experts based on research carried out by Harris Interactive in February-March 2012.

In order to understand customer attitudes towards modern technologies and security threats, the company surveyed almost 9000 consumers from the USA, Europe and Russia.

The survey has shown that about 70% of tablet owners and 53% of mobile phone users use free public Wi-Fi hotspots to go online. This is one of the most popular ways to access the Internet, along with cellular networks, which are used by 58% of those surveyed for data communication.

However, it seems that many users are unaware of the dangers of free Wi-Fi networks, especially the fact that data transferred across the link can easily be intercepted by cybercriminals. That could well include login data for online banking systems. This is particularly alarming given that interception of sensitive financial data is the biggest source of concern for about 60% of users. The problem is exacerbated further by the fact that mobile devices are generally less protected from unauthorised access than desktop or laptop computers.

Massive growth in device usage

"We are experiencing device usage growth like we've never seen before - and the impact on networks is profound and permanent," says Michael Fletcher, sales director for Ruckus Wireless sub-Saharan Africa. "As a result, many users are looking for easy and accessible Wi-Fi access to support their own smart devices - and in many cases, in the rush to connect, they forget about the security implications. Neglecting this area in today's day and age is not acceptable."

The survey also reveals that security solutions are installed on less that half of all tablets and barely a quarter of mobile phones/smartphones (28%). At the same time, 82% of users have antivirus software installed on their home PCs and laptops. This happens even though there are mobile applications such as Kaspersky Mobile Security on the market already designed for protection of both the device itself and the information stored on it.

Designed to be mobile, but...

Surprisingly, although tablets are designed to be mobile, they are most often used to access the Internet from home (49% of users) or office (39%). Work networks usually have a better level of protection and use an encryption protocol to ensure security of the data transferred. However, this doesn't mean other security measures to protect mobile devices can be neglected.

"Fundamentally there is a converse relationship between security and convenience - and in the case of WLAN security; convenience translates into IT management resources in addition to end user time and effort. Finding a balance between the right level of security is critical for control, productivity and most importantly peace of mind," concludes Fletcher.

The full report on the survey by Harris Interactive for February-March 2012 is available following this link: http://www.kaspersky.com/downloads/pdf/kaspersky_lab_consumer_survey_report_eng_final.pdf.