



DEBRETT'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL DISCRETION

kaspersky

Our digital devices are an indispensable part of our everyday life, so much so that our behaviour has been transformed by them. We carry super-computing power in our pockets, with access to the resources of the internet at our fingertips, and it is scarcely surprising we are easily distracted and preoccupied by all this potential.

Transfixed by our digital world, many of us are checking out of the realities of our physical situation. We become absorbed by our screens, scarcely noticing the people that are sitting around us or intruding into our physical space.

Good manners are rooted in an observant awareness of other people and the ways in which our behaviour is impacting on them, so this tendency to withdraw attention is beginning to have a negative impact on our behaviour. This is particularly apparent on public transport, which thrusts us into proximity with strangers. We talk loudly on our phones in quiet carriages, disturbing the people around us, and are becoming increasingly casual about using adequate headphones to absorb the noise that emanates from our devices. Staring at our screens, we do not look at our surroundings, and frequently fail to notice that a fellow passenger needs a seat or assistance.

On a more profound level we become lost in the illusion that we are moving within our own private bubble. Equipped with phones, laptops, headphones, we enter a digital world, where the clear demarcations between public and private space have become blurred or are no longer recognised.

This tendency becomes dangerous when we are using our devices for activities that are essentially private or confidential – working, banking, purchasing online, or conducting personal interactions on social media, for example dating. Lost in our own worlds, we are not sufficiently conscious of the ways in which vitally important security can be breached.

In a 24/7 working culture, where round-the-clock availability is seen as essential and the ability to multitask is crucial, it is scarcely surprising that many of us use 'dead' commuting time to work on documents, send emails, make important business calls. But we are in a public sphere, and we may be subject to close, and malicious, surveillance. How do we protect ourselves?

**Ten Top Tips
for Cyber Security →**

Ten Top Tips for Cyber Security



Beware shoulder surfers

Screens are clearly visible, especially when working on laptops. So, before you settle down to work on a confidential document on public transport, take the simple precaution of finding an isolated seat, if possible. If not, be sure to angle your screen away from nosy neighbours, turn down the brightness settings to make it less legible, or use a privacy screen protector.

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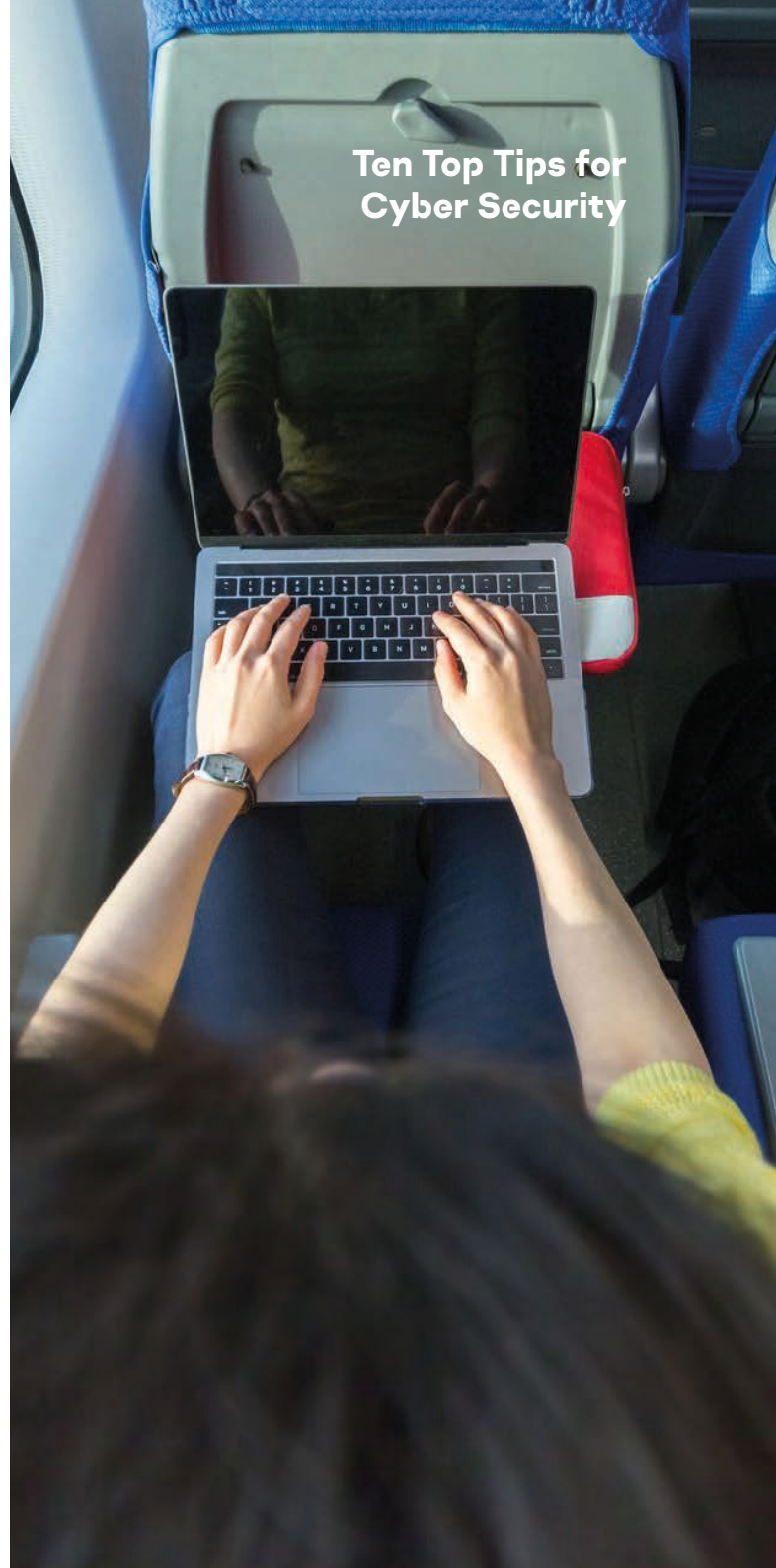
Consider window watchers

When you are travelling at night in a window seat, remember that your screen may be reflected in a dark window on a train or bus, and will be visible to the person who is sitting behind. Turning down the brightness is an easy way of ensuring that reflections are not readable.

Scrutinise Sightlines

You may well be aware of the risk of people sitting next to you being able to see your screen, but have you thought about people looking down on you from above? On tubes and crowded trains, you may be surrounded by strap-hangers, who could easily have a clear bird's eye view of your screen. Try and coach yourself to look up from your screen from time to time and take in your surroundings, and the sightlines, of the people around you and adjust the angle of your screen accordingly.

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Protect your possessions

If you must leave your seat for any reason during a journey, don't leave open screens or papers casually spread across the tabletop. If possible, take your digital devices with you. If you do not want to do this, save and shut down any open documents and close your laptop, and audibly ask a near neighbour to keep an eye

on your possessions, which will alert other passengers. Remember, other passengers can use their phones to unobtrusively take pictures of any incriminating documents, especially if you leave your seat, so be on your guard.

A woman with curly hair is seen from the side, sitting at a desk. She is using a laptop and a smartphone. The background is a blurred office setting.

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Guard your identity

Just because you are not closely observing your neighbours does not mean that they are not watching you with eagle eyes.

Many of us who are travelling to work carry means of identification, for example lanyards around our necks with ID cards, or we may casually place a work ID card next to our open laptop. These cards give an interested observer all sorts of vital information about us and the company we work for and – especially when this data is combined with other intelligence that has been gleaned from eavesdropping or shoulder surfing – could be a vital tool in industrial espionage, extortion or even blackmail.

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Walls have ears

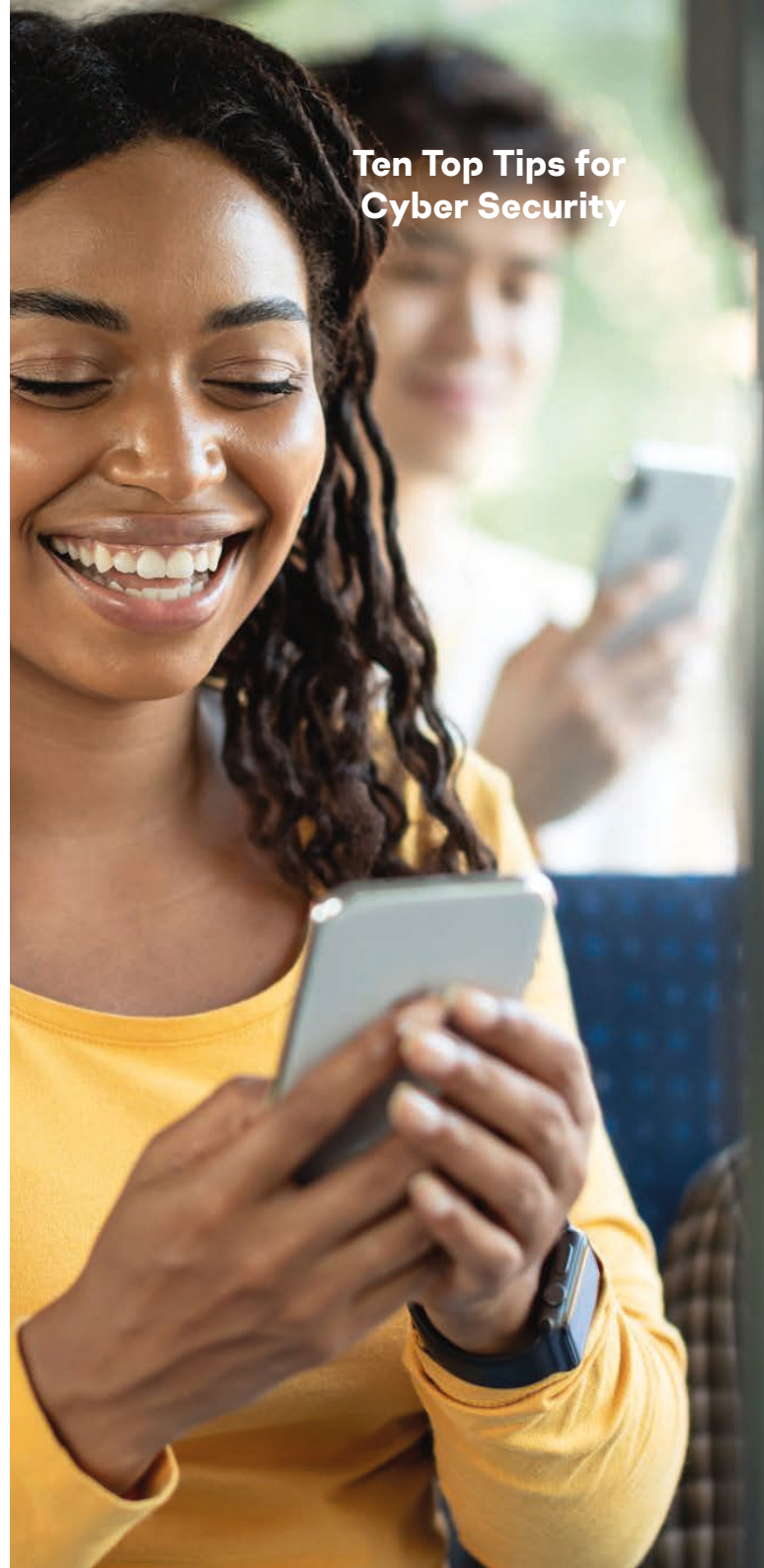
Other people's mobile phone calls have become an inevitable feature of travel on public transport. They're going on all around us, they're frequently intimate, indiscreet or revealing and the perpetrators never seem to notice that they are loudly broadcasting their secrets to all and sundry. As always, bear in mind that – no matter how switched off or removed you may feel – you are travelling in a public space and

other people are observing, and listening, to you. It is extremely irresponsible to discuss confidential or private matters on public transport, because an acute eavesdropper will be able to construe a great deal from overheard conversations and some of that information (management buyouts, mergers, imminent redundancies, share flotations) might well be marketable. Remember, the people who are listening to you also have their own mobile phones and will be able to unobtrusively record a tantalising phone call for later examination and analysis.

Beware audible identification

Do not give away personal details about yourself – name, address, phone number, or even your debit card number, on public transport. You may be calling about something that seems, on the face of it, non-important – a hairdresser’s or dentist’s appointment, a meeting with a builder or a plumber – but your profile can be stored away by interested parties, or even utilised in conjunction with other data that has already been gleaned by other methods and used by criminals to target individuals. You should, of course, be doubly careful about other people’s identity, so never give out similar information about clients or customers in a public context.

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A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a grey cardigan and white headphones, is seated on public transport. She is looking down at her smartphone. The background shows yellow handrails and a grey door.

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Have you heard about headphones?

Many of us would defend our indiscreet phone calls on public transport with the argument that a one-sided conversation is meaningless and non-incriminating, but we have all experienced how audible mobile phone conversations can be, especially when sitting in proximity to the caller, allowing interested listeners to hear

both parties. Always using headphones or earbuds will ensure that avid listeners are not able to piece together entire conversations and will have the added advantage of reducing the amount of noise pollution that you are generating.



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Texting trumps talking

If you ensure your phone screen is not visible, texting is always the safest option when you are communicating in a public space. It is non-obtrusive and will not disturb the people sitting around you; it is also discreet and private, minimising the chances that you are being observed by hostile parties.

A man with grey hair, wearing a beige coat over a red sweater and a blue shirt, is looking down at a smartphone in his hand. He is standing in what appears to be a public transport station or train, with blurred lights and structures in the background.

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Choose discretion over indispensability

Our most indiscreet and incriminating behaviour on public transport often comes from a false sense of indispensability. We are used to being switched on at all times of the day and night, and the constant flow of communications – whether they are texts, calls or emails – on our devices makes us feel like vital cogs in the machine. But we should take the time to challenge this notion and accept that, in most instances, allowing a call to go to voicemail or an email to remain unanswered for a couple of hours, is hardly going to bring our workplace to a crashing halt, or trash our professional reputations. If you are being hounded by impatient colleagues or clients, a simple text explaining that you are on public transport and will be in touch as soon as your journey is completed, should be sufficient to weed out day-to-day business and ensure that your only obligation is to deal promptly with genuine emergencies. Just make sure you do so discreetly.