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# Warchalking: Message or myth?

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Warchalking -- the act of leaving a chalk mark to indicate areas of free wireless access -- has received lots of coverage in the tech press, and there are Web sites devoted to it.

But interviews with a dozen experts turned up just three individuals who had actually seen sidewalk symbols.

"I think it's just a myth," says security expert Tom Ewing of Miami-based Compuquip Technologies. "You can drive around with a wireless device and locate open networks, but why bother to make a chalk mark? It's just illogical."

A la Shades of Bigfoot, there have been some actual sightings of warchalking, which got its name from the 1983 movie WarGames, about a youngster who hacks into a military computer.

"I saw chalk marks in Seattle, and I know others there who've seen chalk, so I can testify that it's more than an urban legend," says John Sidline, director of communications for iPass, a West Coast wireless security firm.

Another expert, who has seen warchalk marks in Seattle and New York, likens the practice to the hush-hush world of espionage.

"I have a military background in cyber security and counterintelligence, and this reminds me of spy tradecraft," says Jose Granado, a partner in Ernst & Young's security and technology solutions practice.

"If there is information to pass to a spy handler, you make a mark on a telephone pole or street sign indicating you've made the drop. Likewise, if it isn't safe to make the drop, you made a different mark."

Chris Cobbs

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