

People are freaking out about some seemingly random text messages from an anonymous phone number. Some TV stations (Meredith stations) have reported they're stealing identities and some Facebook posts claim they're part of a sex trafficking ring and that girls are disappearing after opening it.

So what are these "someone's complimented you" texts? It's time to get to the bottom of it. I downloaded the app to see what it's all about.

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7-17 Jamey Tucker

ANCHOR INTRO

YOU MAY HAVE RECEIVED AN ODD TEXT MESSAGE IN RECENT DAYS, THAT ASKS YOU TO CLICK A LINK.

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE GETTING THE ANONYMOUS MESSAGES SAYING THEY'VE BEEN 'COMPLIMENTED'. THERE'S A GREAT DEAL OF CONCERN, SOME ALLEGING IT'S A DANGEROUS SCAM. OUR CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY REPORTER JAMEY TUCKER TAKES A LOOK AT THE CRYPTIC MESSAGES AND WHAT THEY MEAN.

PACKAGE

Here's what they look like, "Someone complimented you! See more". The suspicious text messages have caused all kinds of fears. This post on Facebook has been shared over 25 thousand times. It claims the text messages include a link to a sex trafficking site that puts a tracker on your phone. And girls are doing missing as a result." That is not true. So what is it?

The text messages are from one of your contacts. and someone who's using the app "IRL", or "In Real Life".

It's a popular app especially with young people and according to its website, it's an attempt to encourage people to spend less time on their phones, and more time "in real

life". I downloaded the app and found users are inviting friends and contacts to do things like, playing games, going to the movies.

But the other aspect of IRL, is to nominate or recommend people for silly things. You select a friend and the app sends the "compliment" to their phone, whether they have the app or not, it includes a link to encourage them to install the app.

The message looks suspicious, sure. But at worst it's a nuisance. The only way the message might track your phone is if you click it, install the app and give it permission to track your phone.

You can block the phone number, but it won't stop the messages. If you don't want the app sending you other messages, reply to the text with the word "Stop".

You're not wrong being suspicious of this or any other anonymous message you receive that includes a link. It's not a good idea to click on any link if you don't know where it goes. but this app being part of a sex trafficking scam...is just not true.

That's What the Tech? I'm Jamey Tucker

ANCHOR TAG

THE APP REQUIRES ACCESS TO ALL OF YOUR PHONE'S CONTACTS, MEANING THE COMPANY HAS THEIR NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS WHETHER THEY DOWNLOAD THE APP OR NOT. BUT DEVELOPERS SAY YOU'LL NEVER GET AN ANONYMOUS MESSAGE FROM A STRANGER, BUT ONLY FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE YOU IN THEIR CONTACTS.

WEB STORY

A mobile app intended to bring people together in real life has created a firestorm of controversy and fear. "IRL", or "In Real Life" encourages its users to send anonymous text messages to their contacts. Facebook posts about these text messages have been shared 25-thousand times which claims the messages are from a sex trafficking ring and that anyone who clicks the attached link will have their phone tracked and that girls are disappearing just by using the app.

The text messages read "Someone has complimented you. See More", and includes links to the app in Apple's App Store and the Google Play Store. There's no evidence that any of these text messages do anything else.

Here's what this app is all about: IRL is popular among older teens and people in their 20s. Users are encouraged to invite their friends (contacts) to dinner, or movies, or hiking trips. If you invite someone on an outing that person will receive an "invite" but they must download the app to see what the invite is all about.

Another feature of the IRL app is for users to "nominate" someone for silly titles. After I downloaded the app I was asked to nominate, IRL calls them 'noms', one of my friends who can make the best brunch, or dunk like Lebron, or is the best cheerleader. Since i gave it permission to see my contacts, four of my contacts showed up on the screen as answers to the question. If I were to tap one of their names, the app would send the 'nom' over a text message to their phone.

Of course, my friend wouldn't see that I sent it, only that someone had recommended them. I have thousands of people and phone numbers in my contacts list, some of whom I don't even remember, so this app has access to every person's name and phone number now. The app's FAQ claims no one will get a text message from a stranger, only from people who have their contact information on their phone.

I applaud IRL for encouraging people to get off their phones and do something in real life, but its method is crazy. People hate being bothered with text messages, especially anonymous messages that include links. After using the app for a few minutes for this story, I deleted it but whether the app still has access to my contacts is another thing. You don't know.

If you do receive one of these messages and you won't nothing to do with the app, you should reply to the text with the word "Stop". The company states those who opt out this way will no longer receive a text message no matter how many times they are "nominated".

IRL is a nuisance to most people but there's no evidence that its part of a sex trafficking ring or that anyone has disappeared after clicking the link.