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### **Privacy in a Modern World**

Privacy has been of concern to people for many ages. As the world develops greater respect for human rights many countries demonstrate great conflict in how to define, protect, and regulate privacy. As the world continues to change, such conflicts will only continue. A major reason for recent conflict stems from the great technological advances in communication, namely the internet. With instant and mass communication at our fingertips the internet has helped to propel the world into a faster, cheaper, and more efficient data age. What does this infer about personal privacy on the web? How can people protect their privacy? Just what is a privacy policy? What should businesses do to implement proper Privacy etiquette? Business websites and users both have the right to understand how to properly use and protect information.

What is privacy? There are of course many different and sometimes conflicting definitions of this term. For the purposes of answering the questions posed, the following definitions may provide some insight. According to Alan Westin privacy is the “claim of individuals, groups, and institutions” to decide for themselves “how, when, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (Lindskog, 3). This leads to the next question: What is a Privacy Policy? Wikipedia defines a privacy policy as “a disclaimer placed on a website informing users about how the website deals with a user's personal information” (Wikipedia). The user wants privacy, the corporation wants to

better market their users, and the privacy policies act as “the mediator” between the two (Walters, 3-4).

A Privacy Policy acts as a disclaimer but also may calm concerns users may have when prompted to share personal information. Thus a privacy policy benefits both Businesses and users. The business can hold a user to their Privacy Policy if the policy is clearly present on the website before the user divulges information which protects the company from being sued. At the same time, a user who may feel uncomfortable sharing personal information may feel more likely to share once they read the Privacy Policy which eases fears. On the other hand, if a business opts not to create and Privacy Policy users may leave the website for business with a higher regard for their information and privacy (Walters, 2).

How has the web changed views on personal privacy? Businesses and other institutions with websites now have the ability to store information about users who access their site, sometimes without the user even knowing. Websites use cookies and databases to store information constantly. They use this information to directly market their users. According to Fred Cate, the reason for a “surge in attention to privacy” is the “result of the rapid spread of information technologies into every facet of life”. With the invention of the internet and the ease of transferring information, websites are constantly looking for new ways to cater to their users. The *New York Times Sunday Magazine* lists everything from your credit card purchases and e-mail to where you visit on the internet as things “routinely collected” (Cate, 2). So where should the line be drawn? Perhaps the most critical point of concern, aside from identity theft, occurs when Businesses share information about you with other parties. These parties then use your telephone number and e-mail address obtained when you signed up or bought a product on another site to

solicit and harass you to buy a completely different product later. Herein lies the conflict. How do users protect their rights to privacy without regulation restricting the flow of information too much on the internet?

With so many agencies out to collect information, in the end the user must take responsibility for their own privacy. The Longskog's reiterate this point when they claim that "Privacy is about self-determination. As individuals we need to decide what we want." There are many ways users can protect themselves. As suggested by Blaine Robertson, a Computer Information Technology professor, some ways include managing cookie settings, using two different e-mail addresses (one to sign up to websites with, and one that is "clean" only used for personal contacts), deleting spam without even opening it, refrain from sending personal e-mails at work (which are often monitored), never giving information in the hopes of an award (companies give you nothing and then sell your information), being conscious of web security (submit only when the site is secure and disabling scripts during normal surfing), or even making up false information to protect your own identity (so long as you are not giving away someone else's information) (Robertson, slides 7-15).

While users ultimately need to protect themselves, websites have a responsibility to protect their users as well. What should businesses and other groups do to implement proper Privacy etiquette? Robertson suggests two implementations, establishing a privacy policy, and including a "workable Records Management program" (Robertson, slide 4). So how does one come up with a privacy policy? The Online Privacy Alliance offers 5 steps to ensure that there are properly creating and using a Privacy Policy:

1. "Adoption and Implementation of a Privacy Policy "

2. “Notice and Disclosure” (The policy must be easy to get to and easy to understand and must also be accessible before a user is prompted to share information.)
3. “Choice/Consent”- (Users must always be given the right to chose how their information will be used when the website wishes to use the information for something unrelated to how the data was obtained. )
4. “Data Security”- Websites should “take reasonable precautions to protect” information gathered “from loss, misuse or alteration.”
5. “Data Quality and Access”- Websites should also “take reasonable steps to assure that the data are accurate, complete and timely for the purposes for which they are to be used.” (Online Privacy Alliance)

By following these guidelines, websites will better protect themselves, and their users. There are not many regulations, and fewer enforced concerning Privacy Policy use. While this can be seen as both positive and negative, the responsibility remains with the websites to properly implement this protection.

In conclusion, because of the enormous advances in communications and information technology, sharing information has caused the need for greater privacy awareness. While websites have the responsibility to ensure they have a proper Privacy Policy, the user must protect themselves by carefully choosing how they share their information. However websites should follow guidelines if they wish to have trust and future business with their users.

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