Privacy Essay, Research Paper

Privacy is something that is everywhere, it is all around you. Privacy is where you eat, it is where you work, it is the people you associate with, it has everyone to do with you and where you do it at. Privacy is highly controversial between individuals, some people shrug it off and say, I have nothing to hide others just don t feel its necessary for someone to know what kind of things they put in their weekly trash. Are new privacy laws needed? Should the government start putting restrictions on what a person or company should know about someone and their past? These questions are very controversial and the answers will vary from person to person because of our different beliefs and traditions. Read along to understand how privacy affects us, how it is being misused, and how our personal information is being let out.

Privacy is everywhere, one place where privacy is often questioned as being too invasive is in the work place. Employers sometimes take it too far, such as monitoring email mailboxes of the employees and also putting up surveillance cameras in order to record daily routines of employees. A study by Nielsen Media Research found that counted together, IBM, Apple, and At&t employees visited Penthouse Magazine s Website 12,823 times in less than one month in 1996 (Grover). Nielsen Media also noted that the average stay was 13 minutes, which amounts to 347 eight-hour working days (Grover). Should this be allowed, the monitoring of websites viewed by the employees while they are in the office? From one aspect I can understand an employer wants to make sure that work is getting done in exchange for a paycheck at the end of the week, but at the same time employees are not robots, and they deserve some freedom. The information super-highway, or the Internet, is one way that we exploit ourselves daily, however we will get back to the Internet in a minute.

Employers monitor workers out of the office also. One way they do this is by giving drug tests and inquiring about their relationships with fellow co-workers, should this be allowed or do you feel that you are being controlled by the agency you work for? Perhaps the hardest thing for an employer to do is to decide where to draw the line when it comes to the privacy of an employee. The smallest things that we over look tell our companies what we do and who we do them with. For instance, when you are filling out an application for employment a commonly asked question is Have you ever been convicted of a felony? Most companies will not hire you if you have been convicted of a felony, regardless of the fact that you might of went through the state s correctional system and rehabilitated into a law-biding citizen. This just does not seem fair that people are getting judged by there past and that they have no way of protecting or changing it. How much should an employer need to know in order to decide if you are going to be a good candidate to fill the job description or not?

Another job application requirement that has always baffled me is the request for references. I do not understand how an employer can ask an applicant for the names, addresses, phone numbers, and occupations of three or more people that are going to say good things about them. I can fully comprehend contacting previous employers in order to talk about job habits, attendance, and expectations for the applicant. It just seems to me that talking to an applicant s friend would provide a very biased opinion.

Video surveillance is another way of monitoring how a worker is going through the day and what kind of work they are getting done. Video cameras are something that you will find in lots of offices today. In the 1998 American Management Association report it showed that 67% of all organizations today have some kind of electronic monitoring over employees (Bevolyn). Three main reasons were provided for this surveillance; performance evaluation (For example, Customer Service Staff), compliance with federal and local laws (For example, Banks), and cost control measures to track employees who browse the Internet or dial 1-900 phone numbers. It is shown that financial service providers and large companies, those with 2,500 employees or more, are most likely to monitor their employees (Bevolyn). So, the next time that you decide to take that 10-minute power nap at your desk or send an e-mail to a buddy you might consider taking a look over your shoulder and see who s watching.

How does privacy really affect us in today s lives? Do you care if someone were to steal your garbage and sort through it in order to find out what kind of toothpaste you use and what kind of pizza you eat? Some people say that they have nothing to hide and that it would not bother them if you were to go through their things and watch what they do. On the other hand most people, including myself, believe that what they do is their business and that others do not need to know their business. Coming around election time when the main political parties are all campaigning to promote their candidate for office. The media is filled with false claims of the other party s candidates. These include skipping out of the draft, using illegal drugs, and many other illegal or un-ethical activities. All the information portrayed in these ads comes from loads and loads of research which is done mainly by normal citizens like you and I.

When you are applying for a credit card, filling out a survey, or even entering a contest to win 10,000 dollars you are giving away your privacy. These companies will sell names out to advertising companies all over the country. If you have ever gotten solicitation in the mail being pre-approved credit cards or just magazine subscriptions that you did not order this is most likely because an advertising company got your name from a list. There are many companies that exist on selling names and addresses of people.

A good example of how a company might get even more personal and financial information is one that is taught to us by Mark Hocchauser Ph.D. Mark wrote an article called, Why I stopped shopping at Amazon.com. Mark starts off by telling us about Amazon Incorporation and how their service works. Amazon.com focuses on bringing products to consumers at the lowest rates by posting the prices from many fellow companies all linked up to their enormous search engine. In order to purchase something from Amazon.com you must fill out a complete information sheet with all information about yourself, where you live, phone numbers, and even keep a credit card on file with them. Mark goes on to tell us that their policy states that Amazon.com gathers information on a person and creates a profile about them. Once you have logged into the website under your personal username it starts building a profile for you, every search you do is noted by product category and price. After these profiles are created Amazon.com does not say what they do with them. Do not forget this information has everything about you in it now including your likes and dislikes which would allow an advertising company to decide what kind of magazine they should send you. After reading this Mark decided that he needed to cancel his account with Amazon.com and this is where the problems really began. After surfing the website at Amazon.com for over 3 hours I could not find a single policy or procedure for canceling my account, said Mark (Hocchauser). It was only after Mark e-mailed the helpdesk explaining the situation and the request for canceling his account he was answered back by an email from an Amazon.com Customer Care Representative. The representative started by telling Mark that his information was submitted voluntarily through the searches and that his information was not given out past the companies that sell their products through Amazon.com. (By the way Amazon.com prides itself with having over 100,000 products with many international affiliates.) After assuring Mark that his account will be closed and his credit card will be taken off file he offered another e-mail address where mark would have to send notification for account closure. Now Mark s personal information with his address and telephone number is spread across the entire business affiliates of Amazon.com and perhaps even farther from the never ending chain of co-branded sites.

How do these companies get all of this information and who is supplying them with it? The answer for the most part is you! Lots of companies will resell your personal information but somebody has to start out with it first before it can be duplicated. The information can come from anywhere, but here are a few examples. Perhaps one of the biggest leaks in personal information is contests and give-aways. There are lots of these on the Internet and around shopping malls. Websites such as Free Lotto (http://www.freelotto.com) claims to give away over 10 million dollars in a single month to two lucky individuals. Whether or not this is true is not my point, in order to sign up for this drawing you have to submit your complete set of information excluding your social security number. Once you click submit on the bottom of the page you are signed up to win a million dollars but you are not guaranteed that your information will be kept private. When I conducted a web search through webcrawler.com with the context search words, win money it returned 183,283 sites (Webcrawler Win Money ). This was very ironic because when using the same search engine I did another search this time using the search words, privacy protection and only returned 140,420 sites (Webcrawler privacy protection ). This shows that the concern to win the Quick Dollar is more important than protecting the ones we already have. The internet is not the only way that companies get information about consumers though, when you signup for a discount club or some type of mailing list your information is sent out. If you have Kroger Discount Card or have entered the Publisher s Clearing House sweepstakes then you have submitted your information to a company that has not promised you they will not reproduce or reprint it.

There are many ways that people can protect themself from having their name all over the Internet and in the hands of any company that needs to send out fliers. Most of these ways are going to seem silly and impractical to today s modern society because of the convenience that credit cards, online banking, and other similar services offer. Here are a few simple ideas that will help you in beginning the process of privacy. An easy way of keeping telephone marketers away is by having your phone number not published in the phonebook and also having caller identification blocking enabled. These are free options you have with almost all phone companies today. Another good way is to set a number or password on your credit report so that no one can access it without having your prior permission. These are just a few ways of keeping information to yourself however there are lots of tips, both useful and abstract, at this website: http://www.privacyrights.org/ar/donray.htm.

There are many ways that people are accessing our information but for the most part it is not to hurt you but only to sell you something. You might think that I am a bit paranoid about privacy and a little skeptical about what people know about me, but this is my feeling on the subject. In today s world of high tech electronics and super information systems you have to be careful just what you let people know about you, especially if you are a political figure in society. So remember the next time that you re on the information super highway that you are sitting on a two-way street. As Whitfield Diffie wrote in book, Privacy On The Line: The Politics of Wiretapping and Encryption, The right to be let alone is not realistic in modern society.

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