

# How much privacy can we expect in age of Internet?

## *Young seem unconcerned by data mining*

This spring's annual Media Law seminar in Kansas City, which I help organize for media lawyers across the nation, was as fascinating as ever. I always leave with some "food for thought." This year, what really got me to thinking was a discussion about personal privacy in the age of technology.

Speakers were focusing on the growth of intellectual property freely available on the Internet. That data has become a service, not a product, they opined. (This is an important concept because intellectual property has almost always been viewed as a product – think about the concept of trademarks and copyrights.) Familiarity with information has value, and access to that information is a service that the public wants.

Obviously, technology enables this to happen. What does that mean to you? Well, it means that not only are you searching the Internet for data, but those who provide data via the Internet are also seeking more personal information about you as you search the Internet – personally identifiable information (PII) about you has value to them and allows them to offer even more services to those who want to know what you are seeking online.

We used to think about government surveillance. (Well, I guess, given the fact that the AP found itself being investigated by the government, we STILL need to think about government surveillance.) Today, it's not just the government watching us. We all are well aware that the computer is watching us. We've all seen how the ads beside our emails in our Gmail accounts seem remarkably related to whatever we've been

talking about in those private missives.

That issue brings two points to the table that need further thought, it seems to me. One is that as access to information about you becomes greater, the argument strengthens that access to the operations gathering that information needs to become more transparent, too.

In short, as one speaker suggested, "Those surveilling us need to be as open to surveillance as they make us." It seems to me that this is true not only of government, which has been "surveilling us" for longer than we probably know, but also true of those private businesses that are watching our every on-line move.

The second point raised was a two-pronged concept that really surprised me. First, when offered privacy for more money, people won't generally pay for it. Secondly, young adults are unconcerned about data miners having their data, while older adults seem to be more uncomfortable about the concept.

Isn't that an interesting thought? What does that mean? I understand



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the first one well – sometimes the cost of keeping your life private is more than it's worth. For example, there are surveillance cameras everywhere outside today in most cities. If asked, many folks would say they don't want folks knowing everywhere they go. But do they make a habit of charting their paths down the street in ways to avoid those cameras? It's highly unlikely – most of us are used to just ignoring them.

Think about all the video that surfaced of the recent Boston Marathon bombing and how that contributed to solving that crime. Most folks don't even think about this fact anymore.

Now, given that discussion and the thoughts it generates, tell me why some folks in government continue to treat public data as their own property? I'm not painting with a broad brush here. I am well aware that more and more public agencies are seeing the wisdom of putting their public data online so that they no longer have to deal with basic requests for access to the information in their offices – it's already on the web for the public to access as needed.

But a few agencies still seem to struggle with releasing the records they hold. It's certainly a question worth pondering. There are many answers. Perhaps it's related to an issue of possible wrongdoing and protecting those within the agency. For example, it's not unusual that when some data is released, heads roll. Perhaps it is a control issue – information can be power.

Whatever the reason, I am encouraged to hear the younger generation is less concerned about information being public. I hope this eventually translates into more sunshine in government.

## K.C. Star series wins Headliner, SPJ awards

*The Kansas City Star* won first place in the National Headliner Awards for its online presentation of an investigative project in 2012.

"Beef's Raw Edges," a series by Mike McGraw and Alan Bavley, placed first in the newspaper-affiliated website category of the contest, which is sponsored by the Press Club of Atlantic City, N.J.

The series also won the Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi

award for public service in online journalism on a newspaper-affiliated website.

The internet presentation included video interviews with consumers sickened by meat-borne pathogens, graphics showing how the cattle industry and mechanical tenderization work, maps of the Midwest's animal health corridor and searchable documents containing meat inspectors' findings at the big three beef plants.