

Chapter I

Web Privacy: Issues, Legislations, and Technological Challenges

Alok Mishra, Atilim University, Turkey

Deepti Mishra, Atilim University, Turkey

Abstract

People all over the world increasingly are concerned about the privacy issues surrounding the personal information collected by private organizations, governments and employers. Privacy relates to issues regarding collection, secure transmission, storage, authorized access, usage, and disclosure of personal information. This information is used for commercial gain by many organizations. Individual privacy concerns significantly affects consumer willingness to engage in electronic commerce over the Internet. The increased use of the Internet and Web for everyday activities is bringing new threats to personal privacy. This chapter assessed various issues related to individual privacy on the Web, growing concerns among the Web users, technologies employed for collecting and protecting information on the Web, privacy-enhancing technologies and the legal provisions to curb the Web privacy. This chapter also reported detailed discussion about Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P), its structure, present scenario of its implementation and its future success. Global consistency on Internet privacy protection is important to promote the growth of electronic commerce. To protect consumers in a globally consistent manner, legislation, self-regulation, technical solutions and combination solutions are different ways that can be implemented

Introduction

The Internet is proliferating in an exponential way all over the world. It has the potential to change the way people live. With only a few mouse clicks, people can follow the news, look up facts, buy goods and services, and communicate with others from around the world (Chung & Paynter, 2002). People can provide information about themselves if they are not careful. This raises concerns regarding threats to their personal privacy whilst online. Information privacy has been recognized as an important issue in management, and its significance will continue to escalate as the value of information continues to grow (Mason, 1986; Raul, 2002; Rust, Kannan, & Peng, 2002). Therefore personal privacy in information systems is becoming increasingly critical with widespread use of networked systems and the Internet (Earp, Anton, Aiman-Smith, & Stufflebeam, 2005). These technologies provide opportunities to collect large amounts of personal information about online users, potentially violating those users' personal privacy (Bellotti, 1997; Clarke, 1999). Web users are becoming increasingly concerned about what personal information they may reveal when they go online and where that information might end up. It's common to hear about organizations that derive revenue from personal information collected on their Web sites. Information you provide to register for a Web site might later be used for telemarketing or sold to another company. Seemingly anonymous information about your Web-surfing habits might be merged with your personal information. Web sites might e-mail you to say that their privacy policies are changing, but most of us find it difficult and time-consuming to read and understand privacy policies or to figure out how to request that the use of our personal information be restricted. Privacy concerns are making consumers nervous about going online, but current privacy policies for Web sites tend to be so long and difficult to understand that consumers rarely read them.

Although there is no universally accepted definition, privacy can be articulated as the need to secure for the individual "the right to be left alone" or as the "state or condition of limited access to a person" (Schoemann, 1984; Warren, & Brandeis, 1980). Alan Westin's well known definition of privacy describes privacy as the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others (Westin, 1967). While Warren and Brandeis (1980) defined privacy as the "right to be left alone." Information privacy exists when the usage, release and circulation of personal information can be controlled (Culnam, 1993). Three key elements of information privacy includes separateness, restricted access, and beneficial use. Separateness is defined as the ability to describe the boundaries and ownership or access rights to information. Restricted access refers to the ability to protect the identified data,

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