Threats posed by the internet to personal privacy essay sample

Technology, Internet

Privacy is a very important issue to Internet users. Fear of disclosure of personal information about an individual has prevented many from using the Internet. According to a 2000 U. S. News & World Report survey, 86% of Internet users fear that continued use of the Web threatens their privacy. Private information, in the wrong hands, can cause a great deal of harm to the individuals concerned. There are several issues related to the Internet and privacy that raise concerns for many users. The users of the Internet should understand the ways that their personal information is obtained and some ways to prevent, at least some of, their information from being divulged when using the Internet

Information is readily available on the Internet and very easily accessible. There is information that users would prefer not be disclosed that are easily obtained. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) can provide a plethora of information about an individual, including name, address, and credit card. They can recapture email that was sent through their services. In addition, ISPs can recapture session information, such as the sites that were visited by a user, through its service. ISPs have divulged personal and private information about individuals, leading to embarrassment and negative employment situations.

Cookies are another way that information is obtained on a user. Cookies are small records placed on a user's computer while visiting a website. The website can read the cookie later to identify the personal preferences. This information will enable the user to navigate the website more easily on return visits. Websites can recall registration information, so that users do

not have to register each visit. Cookies also enable a user to move forward and backward within a site each session. Most cookies last during a user's session, but some can be programmed to last forever. This can allow the site to keep track of the users movements on the Web. Several privacy groups have argued that a cookie is technology that monitors and records users activities, without consent of the users, and that type of technology violates the user's privacy. Defenders of cookies, who are usually owners of online businesses, maintain that they are performing a service for repeat users of a Web site by " customizing" the way that information is retrieved and by providing the user with a list of preferences for future visits to that Web site.

Web bugs can also disclose personal information that many of us would prefer to keep confidential. Web bugs are images embedded in a web page that can transmit information to a remote computer when the page is viewed. Then the remote computer can track which computer accesses which page. Several companies have used this type of tracking device to gather information about online shoppers. These web bugs can also help firms or organizations detect information leaks by being attached to certain documents that would allow the author or company to track where a document is being read.

The Constitution allows the sale of public record information under the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. Almost any type of public record information is available on the Internet. It is nearly impossible not to have some of your information on the Internet. Public records such as home purchases, marriages, divorces, police reports and arrest dockets are all

public record. Further, individuals who choose to participate in commercial transactions on the Internet must give up some personal information to have access to credit and other financial services. Users must realize and accept that if they provide this information it may be used and distributed without their permission and that there is potential for misuse. The average American is listed on many computerized databases and probably does not even realize. Many fear the adverse consequences if that information gets in the wrong hands.

There have been recent privacy concerns because of the kind of personal information that can now be obtained or " mined" from a database. These concerns arise from a certain technique commonly referred to as data mining. Data-mining technology is defined by Cavoukian (1998) as a " set of automated techniques used to extract buried or previously unknown pieces of information from large databases." Using these techniques, it is possible to find patterns and relationships and to use this to make decisions and forecasts. As a result of data-mining applications, an individual might find that they now belong to a group that they are unaware of and did not sign up or register for.

The threat to having our information exposed is very real. From having our bank accounts hacked and identities stolen to our credit card numbers being stolen and credit being ruined. However, I feel that keeping all of a person's information off of the Internet is impossible. We have advanced to a level of information gathering that is impossible to control. The only thing that can be done is to harshly punish those that abuse the information that is out

there. And to protect our computers by staying up to date on the types of protection available, such as a number of privacy-enhancing tools. One such product from Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) is pgpcookie. cutter, which enables users to identify and block cookies on a selective basis. This greatly reduces information being obtained from your computer that you may not want released. These types of protection are out there but as with technology, there is new stuff everyday to defeat yesterdays technology. Staying vigilant and aware will help from becoming a victim of fraud and theft of personal information.

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