

The Personal Information Cost of Computer Technology.

Let's face it, computers are awesome. This technology has made our lives easier by allowing us to easily communicate with one another, shop for just about anything we want, create art (or what you consider as art), write books/blogs, share ideas (some good, some not so good), reveal personal goals through social media, etc. If you consider where we are and where we were fifty years ago, it seems inconceivable just how much the world has morphed around the advancement of computer technology. Although I am painting this as a positive thing (and it is), this technology does come at a negative cost to consumers, businesses, and governments.

The first personal computers have been around since 1971, and since then the world has changed rapidly and quickly to adapt to this new technology. Of course, the real push for computer technology to really take off was not until they could communicate with one another using what we use today; the internet.

Why am I mentioning all of this? It is quite simple, sometimes when a technology is thrusting us forward faster than we can catch up, the problems (moral code for instance) of how society will utilize this invention cannot be foreseen. Who would have thought that 30% of total information sent over the internet would be pornography? Or the pilfering of personal, proprietary, medical, and financial information would be an everyday occurrence? Fifty years ago, when a criminal wanted to rob a bank it would take time, you had to plan, physically go to the bank (brick and mortar), grab the money (which money weighs a lot), get away without the police catching you, and physically spending the money. A lot has changed.

Today, computers have made it easier for criminals to do their bidding with anonymity. With just a few keystrokes, they could rob a bank or steal personal information without leaving their home (or the internet café).

One of the unforeseen challenges is the daily prodding and theft of personal information. Personal information theft has become a crime people often worry about. Approximately 14.4 million consumers were victims of identity theft in 2019 (about 1 in 15 people). And computers have made this easier. The information they acquire can be sold, open credit card accounts, open banking information, etc. All kinds of horrific things. Personally, I have had my personal information used to request a duplicate debit card to be sent to them in the Caribbean. Additionally, my father had his information used to buy cars (yes plural) in California through loan applications completed online. Today personal information is a target you should be concerned about.

There are companies whose sole purpose is to protect your personal information. For a fee, companies like Lifelock, Identity Guard, Norton, TransUnion, etc. help protect your data by using their own algorithms built to search the web for keywords linked to your personal data.

Whose responsibility is it to protect your information? This is a topic that is heavily debated. Is it personal, the governments, or a business (like amazon) responsibility? Is it all the above? In 2016, The European Union took steps to help protect the private information of their citizens by issuing "The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which governs how personal data of individuals in the EU may be processed and transferred." In 2018, the GDPR took effect and beginning of the "cookie consent law" (why you now witness websites asking if voluntarily allow cookies/tracking systems on your system

when visiting specific webpages) would begin. If you have not read this document, I encourage talking a look at the 88 pages of EU lawyer talk. No matter your stance on big government stepping in to regulate, I think the GDPR is a good start to regulating how personal information is handled through electronic means. Here is the address for the document in the case you want to know more information:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679&from=EN>

References

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