

# Privacy Issues with the Internet

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## Privacy Issues with the Internet

Privacy has long been as elusive as the mythical Fountain of Youth. The very idea of "protecting" information about family stirs up ominous images of powerful agencies stealing our individuality and even our identity. The fears about privacy have grown exponentially with the Web. But who are we protecting ourselves from? The government? Not likely, at least in the Orwellian sense that most of us imagine it. While Congress passes the laws and regulatory bodies enforce them, media focus of late has been on the private sector, particularly commercial

Websites. Civil libertarians' [protests](#) against information-collecting Websites are [enigmatic](#) given that most of this information has already been available for years in libraries, in town halls, in departments of motor vehicles and from countless other places. Thus it should be understood that "privacy" is largely an illusion. While the [Lewinsky](#) tapes raised eyebrows, the media fanfare over the issue shows that someone, somewhere, when you least expect it, will place a higher priority on something that compromises your privacy.

Nevertheless, the increasing commodification of personal information is worrisome to this author, particularly when the "collectors" get their information wrong or draw incorrect conclusions from the data they acquire. Already, some national pharmacies have tried to sell information about their customers to marketers. (In at least one case the pharmacy backed off after critics severely chastised them for the plan). No doubt other organizations will move to sell medical records to the highest bidder. What does this mean to the public? ...

... middle of paper ...

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However, many other TRUSTe licensees provide more extensive privacy statements for visitors to scrutinize. Nevertheless, trust and privacy guarantees don't come cheap. Costs for TRUSTe licenses range from \$299 to almost \$5,000, depending on the licensee's corporate revenue. While

\$5,000 may not be a lot for a Microsoft, \$299 is quite a bit for a start-up firm with no annual revenue. This license allows TRUSTe clients to showcase a mark of trust that could easily (but not legally) be copied and used by any Website developer who wants to capitalize on trust. With all the trust-brokers on the Web, the question remains whether "buying trust" is any less elusive than the Fountain of Youth. Moreover, one should ask, who is worthy of trust management?

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