

Larry's newsLETTER



Does Anybody Care about Online Privacy Anymore?

In some ways, we as a society seem to be more concerned about privacy than ever before. If you live in the U.S., your mailbox - the physical one outside your door is probably cluttered up regularly with brochures disclosing the privacy policy of some credit card company, bank or other institution with which you do business. Most of us think it's because they all love plying you with paper you'll probably only glance at and throw away; they are required by law to send you that information.

We are also bombarded with good advice from our local police, the FBI, and other organizations, cautioning us to guard our precious social security numbers, dates of birth and other personal information as if it were gold. Then the federal government turns around and sends us correspondence that prominently displays that same information, to what's probably an unsecured mailbox out on the street because they specify that you use that address instead of a more secure P.O. box.

Some states routinely used your social security number as your driver's license number. That meant any time you cashed a check or bought a bottle of wine you had to show your ID, you had to reveal your SSN too. Luckily, this is now prohibited by federal law, but that doesn't stop other public and private entities from using the SSN as a de facto national ID number. Just try having your electricity turned on or getting CATV or phone service without giving up those supposedly secret numbers.

Speaking of electricity, a letter was received to notify someone about a data breach that may have involved their non-public personal information. The letter ends with "We take the protection of your personal information very seriously." Apparently not seriously enough. What could we have done to avoid having that personal info exposed? Not a darn thing; it's not as though you can just decide not to do business with the power company, after all.

Your credit report is a document that contains just about everything anyone needs to know to steal your identity and destroy you financially. You'd think it would be off-limits to anyone except those from which you want to buy something on credit. Not so. That same electric company that takes protection of your information so seriously checks your credit when you open an account with them, to decide whether or not you'll be required to put up a deposit. Employers check credit records when you apply for a job, on the theory that how well you handle your personal finances indicates how reliable you'll be as an employee. Insurance companies check your credit record even if you're paying cash in advance for the insurance - and charge you more for the insurance if you have a poor credit score. And the list goes on.

Techie Term: Drag and Drop - a feature on the Mac which allows one to drag the icon for a document on top of the icon for an application, thereby launching the application and opening the document.



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Some people think the right to privacy is guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, but actually there is no explicit mention of it there. However, that right is implied in the Bill of Rights, for example by the limits on search and seizure, and several Supreme Court decisions over the years have held that privacy is a basic human right.

Of course, it's not just in regard to identity information that we've lost our privacy. The list of library books we check out can be turned over to law enforcement. The feds are notified if we engage in any cash transaction over \$10,000 - or any other banking activity that's deemed to be "out of the ordinary." Some states have laws that allow police to arrest you for "failure to make identity known" - provide ID - even if you aren't operating a vehicle and even if there is no probable cause that you've committed a crime.

Given the deterioration of privacy out there in the "real world," is it any wonder that so many people seem to have little regard for giving up all sorts of intimate information about themselves online? Perhaps we've all given up on the whole concept of privacy. Certainly kids today have grown up with far less of it than we older folks were used to during our formative years, at least when it comes to what strangers know or can easily find out about you.

On the other hand, when I was a kid, there were plenty of people who knew a lot about you: your neighbors, your extended family, your church group. Those folks often knew more of your business than you might wish they did, but for the most part they could be trusted to do nothing with the information that was more harmful than a little gossiping. Today many people don't even know their next door neighbors' names, have never met their aunts and uncles and cousins (who may live hundreds or thousands of miles away) and if they do go to church at all, it's just to gather on Christmas and Easter with a bunch of strangers doing the same obligatory duty.

Maybe it's because of this feeling of isolation in the physical world that so many people eagerly share more than they should about themselves in the virtual one. Social networking sites are exploding in popularity and they are great tools for "connecting" and keeping in touch with all those old friends and relatives who are spread out across the country or even around the globe. They can also be useful for networking with business associates - but it's important to be careful about what you're saying and to whom you're saying it.

Some folks set up their social networking pages and open them up to the world - allowing anyone who's a member of the site to view their pages. That's okay if your objective is to meet new people, but it also means you need to be much more diligent about what you post there. Even if your page is configured to only allow your friends to see it, don't forget that what you post on their "walls" can be viewed not just by them but also by *their* friends (at the very least, and maybe everyone else depending on how they have the privacy settings configured on their own pages.

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Quotes of the Week

"Most smiles are started by another smile."

"Happiness is not a state to arrive at, but a manner of traveling."

"Of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important."

-Barbara Jean



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This was brought home to me by a couple of things I saw on Facebook last week. First a friend of mine posted something on my wall, asking me to call him at his cell number (and giving that number). I quickly deleted it from my wall to keep it from being exposed to everybody I know. Then shortly after that, I saw a post on the wall of one of my friends, made by someone I didn't know, advising that he was staying at a certain hotel in a certain city and giving the room number. Did that guy really want me to have that information?

You might think that you could avoid the whole problem easily: just don't use social networking. But that might not be the best solution. Once upon a time, employers saw people who had MySpace sites as a little suspect. Today, we're hearing reports of companies that won't hire you if you don't have a Facebook profile. In fact, today many employers doing background checks expect to be able to use the Internet to find out more about a job candidate. Someone who turns up a blank on a web search may appear to be, at best, out of touch - and at worse, it looks as if you might be hiding something.

Oddly enough, some social networking pros say your best defense of your privacy might be to put out a lot of info about yourself out there - while being very selective about exactly what that information is. The rationale: if people find plenty of stuff to read about you, they think they're getting it all and don't feel compelled to dig harder.



Welcome to
My Website!

FIRST DIGITAL DISPLAY WATCH

The digital display watch was the newest way to tell time in 500 years. The first digital watch, a Pulsar LED prototype in 1970, was developed jointly by Hamilton Watch Company and Electro-Data. John Bergey, the head of Hamilton's Pulsar division, said that he was inspired to make a digital timepiece by the then-futuristic digital clock that Hamilton themselves made for the 1968 science fiction film 2001: A Space Odyssey. On April 4, 1972, the Pulsar was finally ready, made in 18-carat gold and sold for \$2,100. It had a red light-emitting diode (LED) display. Digital LED watches were very expensive and out of reach to the common consumer until 1975, when Texas Instruments started to mass produce LED watches inside a plastic case. These watches, which first retailed for only \$20, reduced to \$10 in 1976, saw Pulsar lose \$6 million and the Pulsar brand sold to Seiko.

Watches with LED displays were popular for a few years, but soon the LED displays were superseded by liquid crystal displays (LCDs), which used less battery power and were much more convenient in use, with the display always visible and no need to push a button before seeing the time.

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The History Of Area Codes

- AT&T introduced the North American Numbering Plan (NANP) in 1947 to enable customers to dial their own long distance calls. Previously, all these calls were made through an operator. The NANP is shared by the United States, Canada, Bermuda, and 18 Caribbean nations.
- NeuStar is the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA). As NANPA, it assigns area codes, prefixes, and other telephone codes to the industry. It also recommends plans for area code relief.
- Originally, all area codes had "0" or "1" as the middle digit (312, 906, 616, etc.). This allowed 152 usable combinations.
- Use of these 152 area codes was initially slow, 90 were assigned by 1950, 120 by 1960, 122 by 1970, 125 by 1980, then, things took off.
- Starting January 1, 1995, the format was changed so a "0" or "1" were no longer required as the middle digit. An area code can now be virtually any combination of numbers (765, 734, 847, etc.)

Electronic Systems Quarza.

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