



PRIVACY

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Google Sounds Clarion Call for Global Privacy Standard



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Google is taking a vanguard position in the effort to establish a unified global privacy standard for the treatment of personal data. The idea isn't new, but previous efforts have failed -- in large part due to substantial differences in the way nations view citizens' rights to privacy.

[Google](#) (Nasdaq: GOOG) -- the company that championed the concept that no piece of information was too small not to be indexed for public consumption -- is calling for the development of a global privacy standard.

The Internet has been leveraged in countries that have no such policies, said Google Global Privacy Counsel Peter Fleischer in an address to a [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (UNESCO) conference.

Without a standard in place, confidence in the channel -- ubiquitous though it may be -- will eventually be shaken, even for very routine transactions, he contended.

"As a consumer, how do you know that your [data](#) is protected, wherever it is located?" Fleischer [wrote in a blog](#) posted on Friday. "As a business, how do you know which standards of [data protection](#) to apply? As governments, how do you ensure that your consumers and your businesses can participate fully in the global digital economy, while ensuring their privacy is protected?"

Many Attempts, No Harmony

Google is hardly the first to propose standardization in this area, but previous attempts to establish a global platform never got off the ground. The prime culprit, of course, has been the gulf in attitudes countries espouse toward consumer rights and the use of personal data in the public realm.

The European Union, for example, is far more protective of consumer data and privacy than the United States, which gives [businesses](#) significant latitude to use customer data for purposes unrelated to the immediate transaction 📦.

Some of the other standards that have been proposed include the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Privacy Framework and guidelines set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

While these sometimes competing regional and local policies have served the global e-commerce community thus far over the last 10 years, the patchwork system 📦 is now fraying, Fleischer said.

"Data on the Internet flows around the globe at nearly the speed of light," he wrote. "To be effective, privacy laws need to go global."

Most search engines would welcome a global privacy policy, Mary Hodder, founder and chairman of video search engine [Dabble](#), told TechNewsWorld.

"Any company that does business around the world would have a much easier time if it didn't have to worry about competing standards," she said.

Practical Issues

Yet there are clearly a number of practical issues that could hinder -- or altogether derail -- such a standard from ever taking shape, not the least of which are the differences in attitudes among countries and regions.

"To get the separate countries to sign on to such a standard would be close to impossible," said Carole Crawford, president of [The Saturn Partners](#), which writes security 📦 policies for banks, hospitals, government bodies and private clients. "The goal is noble, but I cannot realistically see how it would be implemented -- much less policed."

However, Google might be pursuing a different goal in its call for a privacy standard, Harold Krent, dean and professor of Chicago-Kent College of Law, told TechNewsWorld.

"Given that the UN rules would probably not be binding on member nations until they enacted implementing legislation, Google's tack might not be successful as a formal matter," he said. "Google nonetheless might succeed in showing that the UN's standards, even if not binding, should set the standard for reasonable practices as determined by courts in common law countries."

Google's aim is likely to establish a uniform set of principles so that companies such as itself will not have to abide by inconsistent rules across nations, Krent explained. As a practical matter, that means adopting the most restrictive set of rules.

"Many companies in comparable settings have argued for uniform and preemptive regulation from Congress to avoid possibly more onerous regulation in the respective states," he commented. **EOT**

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