

## 15.8: INTERNET PRIVACY

The statement internet privacy is an oxymoron. It can be argued that privacy on the internet does not exist. What is most interesting is how willingly many people give it up. The use of social media, smartphones and unsecured Wi-Fi are everyday occurrences.

The following excerpts are from The Harvard Gazette article, *On internet privacy, be very afraid* by Liz Mineo, Harvard Staff Writer dated August 24, 2017. She interviewed cybersecurity expert Bruce Schneier, a fellow with the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School. The interview illustrates how the use of the internet subjects all of us to our loss of privacy. The article makes the point that while we may have legitimate concerns about the government violating our constitutionally protected privacy rights, perhaps our bigger concerns should be with big business. (<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/08/when-it-comes-to-internet-privacy-be-very-afraid-analyst-suggests/>)

In the internet era, consumers seem increasingly resigned to giving up fundamental aspects of their privacy for convenience in using their phones and computers, and have grudgingly accepted that being monitored by corporations and even governments is just a fact of modern life.

In fact, internet users in the United States have fewer privacy protections than those in other countries.

GAZETTE: After whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations concerning the National Security Agency's (NSA) mass surveillance operation in 2013, how much has the government landscape in this field changed?

SCHNEIER: Snowden's revelations made people aware of what was happening, but little changed as a result. The USA Freedom Act resulted in some minor changes in one particular government data-collection program. The NSA's data collection hasn't changed; the laws limiting what the NSA can do haven't changed; the technology that permits them to do it hasn't changed. It's pretty much the same.

GAZETTE: What about corporate surveillance? How pervasive is it?

SCHNEIER: Surveillance is the business model of the internet. Everyone is under constant surveillance by many companies, ranging from social networks like Facebook to cellphone providers. This data is collected, compiled, analyzed, and used to try to sell us stuff. Personalized advertising is how these companies make money, and is why so much of the internet is free to users. We're the product, not the customer.

GAZETTE: It seems that U.S. customers are resigned to the idea of giving up their privacy in exchange for using Google and Facebook for free. What's your view on this?

SCHNEIER: The survey data is mixed. Consumers are concerned about their privacy and don't like companies knowing their intimate secrets. But they feel powerless and are often resigned to the privacy invasions because they don't have any real choice. People need to own credit cards, carry cellphones, and have email addresses and social media accounts. That's what it takes to be a fully functioning human being in the early 21st century. This is why we need the government to step in.

GAZETTE: You're one of the most well-known cybersecurity experts in the world. What do you do to protect your privacy online?

SCHNEIER: I don't have any secret techniques. I do the same things everyone else does, and I make the same tradeoffs that everybody else does. I bank online. I shop online. I carry a cellphone, and it's always turned on. I use credit cards and have airline frequent flier accounts. Perhaps the weirdest thing about my internet behavior is that I'm not on any social media platforms. That might make me a freak, but honestly, it's good for my productivity. In general, security experts aren't paranoid; we just have a better understanding of the trade-offs we're doing. Like everybody else, we regularly give up privacy for convenience. We just do it knowingly and consciously.

GAZETTE: What else do you do to protect your privacy online? Do you use encryption for your email?

SCHNEIER: I have come to the conclusion that email is fundamentally insecure. If I want to have a secure online conversation, I use an encrypted chat application like Signal. By and large, email security is out of our control. For example, I don't use Gmail because I don't want Google having all my email. But last time I checked, Google has half of my email because you all use Gmail.

GAZETTE: Is Google the "Big Brother?"

SCHNEIER: “Big Brother” in the Orwellian sense meant big government. That’s not Google, and that’s not even the NSA. What we have is many “Little Brothers”: Google, Facebook, Verizon, etc. They have enormous amounts of data on everybody, and they want to monetize it. They don’t want to respect your privacy.

(This is not the entire interview which has been edited for length by the Author.)

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