



The truth about privacy

Feature content

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In this fast moving digital age, we can often feel like bystanders as technology and the currency of the modern age moves forward at lightning speed, taking our personal information along for the ride. With smartphones and mobile apps now the communication tool of choice, our information is becoming harder to protect. So what exactly are our rights when it comes protecting our identity and the information profile that is out there about us?

In an era where our personal information is mined to inform organisations about our lifestyles, preferences, shopping habits, health issues and more, where is the line drawn as to what defines personal information? How we can protect it and take control of our own identities?

Added to that, with the use of smartphones and the subsequent download of mobile apps on the rise (according to a Google two thirds of Australians now use smartphones*) it only makes it harder for individuals to maintain control over who has access to their personal information while still enjoying the benefits of modern communication.

What rights do we have to access our own information? And what laws have been put in place to ensure this sensitive personal data has been collected, stored and protected in a secure way?

It is these questions about our personal information that led NSW Privacy Commissioner Dr Elizabeth Coombs to consider just what we really understand about NSW privacy legislation and the systems that are in place to protect our personal and health information.

“Privacy and the issues connected to the concept of privacy are at the very heart of the work we do at the Information and Privacy Commission,” says Dr Coombs. “Our ability to exert our right to privacy speaks to our position of control and self-determination – the respect we have for ourselves, the respect we receive from others, and very importantly, the respect we give to others.”

With this in mind, “Mobilise your privacy, stay safe online” has been chosen as the theme for this year’s Privacy Awareness Week (4-10 May 2014) in NSW, an annual initiative of the Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities (APPA) that provides a platform to discuss privacy issues that affect both individuals and organisations.

It is a concept that should encourage us to consider such questions as:

- What are my responsibilities when using or downloading mobile apps?
- Have I checked my privacy settings lately?
- What are my rights under NSW privacy law?
- Who can help me with this process?

“Privacy Awareness Week provides a great opportunity to inform people about their rights and the processes available to them to protect their personal and health information,” says Dr Coombs. “This is a topic that affects everyone, from the citizens of NSW to the public sector agencies and organisations who manage people’s personal and health information.”

To support Privacy Awareness Week, the IPC has developed a range of fact sheets and guidance on the subject of your privacy rights, for the general public, NSW public sector agencies, health providers and businesses who hold health information.

Dr Coombs is also available for interview on the topics of Privacy Awareness Week and the issues and rights around protecting your personal and health information.

For more information about the IPC and Privacy Awareness Week, visit www.ipc.nsw.gov.au

To schedule an interview, please contact Kate Jobling on (02) 8071 7018 or 0435 961 691 or email ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au.

* Source: Google, *Our Mobile Planet: Australia, 2013*