

Wednesday, August 2, 2006



## Privacy still on Canadian's radar screen: poll

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*On the Cutting Edge* – Brian T.D. Bowman

AN EKOS Research Associates poll released by the privacy commissioner of Canada reveals that privacy remains on the radar screen for Canadians.

A detailed review of the poll, while exposing some disturbing results, provides valuable insight for businesses seeking to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

According to the poll, most Canadians believe that neither governments nor businesses take seriously the responsibility to protect personal information.

In fact, only 11 per cent are confident that businesses take this responsibility very seriously.

Considering that the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) has been in force for years, this is a disappointing figure.

After all, the privacy law was intended to provide Canadians with the confidence to share their personal information with businesses that require such data for legitimate purposes. According to the privacy commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, "Canadians want the government and businesses to take their responsibility for safeguarding personal information more seriously."

These polling numbers present a challenge for businesses that rely on the collection, use or disclosure of personal information in the course of their activities.

For example, pollsters themselves need to collect accurate information in order to provide valuable research for Canadians.

Hardware stores, car dealerships, insurance companies, health-care providers -- even law firms -- all need to manage personal information in order to provide the products and services their clients demand.

If Canadians do not trust businesses to take privacy seriously, they will either refuse to provide information or simply give inaccurate data to such businesses.

It is in everyone's best interests that businesses work harder to gain the confidence of Canadians.

The poll also reveals that Canadians are increasingly knowledgeable and attentive to protecting their own privacy.

The proportion of Canadians reporting that they have a good or very good understanding of their privacy rights has doubled since 2001, rising from 13 to 26 per cent. Sixty per cent rate their attention to protecting the privacy of their own personal information as "good" to "very good."

The polling numbers may explain why more than 85 per cent of Canadians want to be informed by businesses about the privacy implications of products or services they purchase.

This attention to privacy will almost certainly increase in the coming years as technologies, such as the Internet, global positioning systems and customer relations management programs, continue to be embraced by businesses.

As the privacy commissioner has claimed, "the same technologies that facilitate modern commerce can also facilitate identity theft and Internet fraud such as 'phishing.'"

Even though Canadians are reportedly some of the most technology-savvy citizens in the world, the poll indicates they feel no more equipped to understand the privacy implications of new technologies than they were at the start of the decade.

According to EKOS, only half of Canadians say they are confident they have enough information to know how new technologies might affect their personal privacy -- virtually unchanged from the fall of 2000.

Again, this presents an opportunity for businesses that can meet or exceed the privacy expectations of their clientele.

Businesses that can fully explain the privacy implications of their products or services will gain goodwill from customers and Canadians alike, thereby increasing their potential customer base.

Good privacy really is good business.

Share experiences. Have you recently dealt with a business that either takes or does not take your privacy seriously? I want to hear from you. Share your experience by sending me an e-mail at [bowman@pitblado.com](mailto:bowman@pitblado.com).

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