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## **Privacy matters to most customers Staff should be able to handle concerns**

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

Have you ever experienced the following situation?

You are making a purchase at a retail store when the sales clerk asks you for personal information such as your name, home address or telephone number. Concerned about your privacy, you ask why the store requires this information. Appearing confused by the question, the sales clerk curtly replies that "it's store policy" with no further explanation or assurances that your personal information will be properly safeguarded. Not satisfied with this reply, you become upset that the store does not seem to care about your question or your privacy.

There may be a perfectly legitimate reason why the store needs to collect your personal information. Yet the sales clerk's reply has wasted an opportunity for the store to demonstrate respect for your privacy and to maintain your patronage. Instead, and likely because the sales clerk has not been adequately trained by management to respond to privacy questions or concerns, you leave the store frustrated as a result of your experience.

The reason I use this all-too-common situation is not to criticize retail stores or other organizations for asking for your personal information, but rather to highlight the need for organizations in all sectors to train their front-line staff to deal with privacy questions or concerns from customers.

A survey of Canadian businesses released by the federal Privacy Commissioner this summer found that "only one third of [businesses] report having trained staff about their responsibilities under Canada's privacy laws. Larger businesses were more likely to have provided training, with 63 per cent confirming they had done so."

As the federal Privacy Commissioner points out, "[organizations] that have not trained [staff] who deal with personal information are exposing themselves to a significantly increased risk of a data breach."

Even more compelling, and since good privacy is good business, organizations that have not trained staff to deal with privacy questions or concerns from customers are missing out on valuable opportunities to reaffirm to customers why they should patronize their business.

When you think about how much effort and money goes into marketing to customers to get them into a store it is a shame that some organizations would potentially lose a customer when they are at the till ready to open their wallet.

Staff members do not have to become privacy experts. But they should be trained so they can answer the following questions: "Why does our business need to collect customers' personal information?"; "To whom should I refer complaints about privacy matters?"; and "Where can customers obtain a copy of our company's privacy policy?"

These are simple questions, but I suspect that you have experienced situations where businesses fail the grade when pressed to respond to basic privacy questions or concerns.

Canadian privacy laws now require businesses to train and communicate to their staff information about their privacy policies and practices. But the situation described above demonstrates in a very tangible way how privacy training, or lack thereof, can affect a business's bottom line. Organizations deserving of your business will try to answer your privacy questions or concerns in a manner that makes you feel as if you, and your privacy, matter.

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