



Privacy resolutions for 2008

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On the Cutting Edge / Brian T. D. Bowman

THREATS to Manitobans' privacy rights will grow in 2008 unless we resolve to do more to protect personal information in this New Year.

"Heightened national security concerns, the growing business appetite for personal information and technological advances are all potent -- and growing -- threats to privacy rights," says Privacy Commissioner of Canada Jennifer Stoddart. Stoddart states that "the coming year will be another challenging one for privacy in Canada."

With the commissioner's prediction in mind, the following lists my suggested New Year's resolutions for businesses, individuals and the Manitoba government. Some of these resolutions are based on a similar list for Canadians and the federal government released by Stoddart at www.privcom.gc.ca.

Resolutions for Manitoba businesses

- * Protect personal information with strong security.

Stoddart cites a USA Today study of privacy breaches in the United States, Canada and other countries that states that more than 162 million records were compromised by theft or loss in 2007, triple the number of data losses for the previous year.

- * Use encryption to protect personal information on mobile devices.

In 2007, more headlines cited privacy breaches involving mobile devices such as laptop computers. It is vital that businesses ensure personal information on mobile devices are encrypted.

- * Implement procedures to deal with access to information requests.

Many of the privacy complaints in 2007 related to how businesses dealt with access to information requests. Upon request, the law generally requires businesses to inform individuals of the existence, use, and disclosure of their personal information and provide access to that information.

Resolutions for Manitobans

* Think twice before posting personal information on social networking sites.

As Stoddart states, "many Facebook and Myspace users think of these sites as private, when, in reality, the information they post can often be seen by just about anyone."

* Ask questions when someone asks for personal information.

You should always understand why an organization is requesting your personal information such as your phone number or address as well as how it will be used. If you do not understand how your personal information will be safeguarded, ask questions.

* Take steps to protect your personal information.

Invest in a home shredder to properly destroy paper documents that include your name, address, SIN, or other sensitive data that you will be throwing away.

Resolutions for the Manitoba government

* Fulfil the premier's 1999 promise to create a Manitoba Privacy Commissioner.

In 1999 Gary Doer promised in writing to "establish a (Manitoba) privacy commissioner as in the case in other jurisdictions" if he were elected premier. It's now 2008 and after winning three majority terms as premier, Doer has yet to fulfil his promise.

* Move forward with overdue reforms to Manitoba's FIPPA and PHIA laws.

The Manitoba government held public consultations years ago on important amendments to Manitoba's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and Personal Health Information Act (PHIA), but has yet to introduce overdue, and promised, reforms to both laws.

* Support efforts to enact business friendly private sector privacy legislation.

Mavis Taillieu and the Official Opposition in the Manitoba legislature have sustained efforts over the last few years to enact a Manitoba private sector privacy law that would largely replace the application of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) within the province.

I hope my suggested New Year's resolutions help to better protect privacy in 2008. Happy New Year!

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