
Privacy and technologies : a never-ending story

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Privacy and technology: basics

- Advances in technology have made easier
 - to collect
 - to storage
 - to analyze
 - to use personal information
 - Many technologies were created to help users in their routinely activities, using information that each user (un)consciously gives
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Why Google?

- Great mission:

- “Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally useful and accessible” (from the webpage concerning Gmail overview)

- Next step:

- "We are very early in the total information we have within Google. The algorithms will get better and we will get better at personalisation...We cannot even answer the most basic questions because we don't know enough about you“ (E. Schmidt, Google's chief executive, May 2007)
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Googlemania

- Google web search
 - Gmail
 - iGoogle
 - Google street view
 - Google web history
 - Google AdSense
 - Google maps
 - Etc.
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When the law comes in

- On 16 may 2007, the Article 29 Data Protection Working Party send a letter to Google's privacy counsel (Mr Fleischer)
 - “art 29 WP considers a reduced storage period for server logs generated by users of Google services as a valuable step to improve Google's privacy policies ... Google has so far not sufficiently specified the purpose for which server logs need to be kept”
 - “concerning the ‘google cookie’, the lifetime of [it], which has a validity of approximately 30 years, is disproportionate with respect to the purpose of the data processing which is performed”
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Google answer(s)

- 10 June 2007
 - Fleischer states, in a letter addressed to the head of the art 29 Working Party, that “after considering the Working Party's concerns, we are announcing a new policy: to anonymize our search server logs after 18 months, rather than the previously-established period of 18-to-24 months”.
 - 16 June 2007
 - Creation of a company blog totally dedicated to privacy issues.
 - 16 July 2007
 - Fleischer writes in the company's blog that “Google cookies will now expire two years after the user's last visit to Google”.
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What was not expected...

- 25 July 2007
 - Microsoft said that it would anonymise search logs after 18 months
 - Yahoo! announced a cut off point of 13 months
 - Ask.com said that it would produce a tool that would allow users to delete their search history at any time
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Why personal data are so important?

- Through online data collection, content providers not only learn *where* their users receive their information, but *what forms* of information they do and do not consume, *at what times* they consume it, and *what other patterns of consumption* they display.
 - The outcome is an extensive profile for each customer (including preferences, interests, habits, and possibly even personal traits)
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Desired and undesired outcomes

- Profiling can help to target the right advertisement to the person interested in
 - Profiling can speed up the standardization of contracts
 - Profiling can shift from a pre-judgment to a prejudice: imposing higher cost to access or even excluding access to goods and services
 - i.e. autonomy can be hindered by information power
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