



Privacy & Data Protection

Volume 7, Issue 6

June 2007

Headlines:

- Schoolchildren fingerprinted, p.13
- European crime data sharing, p.14
- 3 jailed for data scam, p.15
- Pfizer employee data breach, p.16
- Big Brother fine confirmed, p.16

Inside this issue:

Editorial	2
Current data protection issues for financial institutions—Part I	3
Smith—the importance of file headers	7
US privacy developments	10
News & Views	13

CCTV surveillance is now at extreme proportions

The UK and Irish data protection regulators have delivered warnings as fears grow over the explosion in technology used to monitor individuals.

People are now monitored in the street as well as in the workplace. A recent report by Camerawatch indicates that up to 90% of CCTV cameras in operation in the UK breach data protection law.

UK Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, said, “There are dangers to our privacy, our autonomy, the more the information is converged together.” Stressing that the threat comes from government as well as private companies, he added, “we have got to make sure there is full

accountability and that people don’t go too far and really undermine our fundamental rights and our integrity as individuals.

“People now understand that data protection is an essential barrier to excessive surveillance...The risks that arise from excessive surveillance effect both individuals and society as a whole... too much surveillance creates a climate of fear and suspicion.”

The introduction of privacy impact assessments prior to the installation of CCTV systems will, according to the regulators, ensure organisations set out how they will minimise the threat to privacy and address all the risks of new

surveillance arrangements prior to their implementation. These assessments, which are already commonly used in other countries, such as Australia and the USA, will ensure that ways of working do not lead to unacceptable intrusion into private lives.

Mr Thomas said, “Two years ago I warned about the dangers of waking up to a surveillance society... it is important that there is a vigorous debate around the issue of surveillance—about where lines should be drawn and the restrictions and safeguards which are needed... Many information gathering activities are essential and benefi-

(Continued on page 13)

Google—global privacy threat?

Google, the world’s biggest search engine, is setting out to create the most comprehensive database of personal information ever assembled, with the ability to tell people how to run their lives.

One of the search engine’s aspirations is apparently to gather enough information on individuals to enable it to offer suggestions on how to spend free time or what career move to make.

Eric Schmidt, Google’s

Chief Executive, said that being able to acquire more personal data was key in the company’s expansion plans. “The goal is to enable Google users to be able to ask question such as ‘What shall I do tomorrow?’ and ‘What job shall I take?’”

The commercial sense of such moves by Google and other search engines is obvious. But a difficulty faced by the company is the sheer enormity of the task, not to mention the

adverse publicity it is currently receiving for threatening personal privacy.

Even though people using the services do so from choice not compulsion, they should arguably be protected from uses of their data of which they are unaware. European data protection law requires companies to clearly inform users about such activities and in some cases to obtain prior consent. In general, this should mean that it is not

(Continued on page 13)