



# Tapping into Technology and Privacy – Are they on a collision course?

**ACXIOM HOSTS PRIVACY BRIEFING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

Report by: Neil Matthews, UK Privacy Officer at Acxiom

That was the question posed by Acxiom's Global Privacy Officer, Jennifer Barrett, in a recent House of Commons breakfast briefing attended by senior figures from the Information Commissioner's Office, the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) as well as other regulatory bodies, central government and several leading law firms.

The event clearly hit a nerve with those representing businesses and consumers alike. Information gathering and surveillance is at an all time high and whilst they help deter crime, prevent fraud and support sales and marketing they also open the door for 'spammers', security breaches and over zealous data collection. New technology continually pushes new boundaries when it comes to what and how data can be used and as a consequence, consumers are becoming more uncomfortable and less trusting with their personal information.

That concern is also growing at a government level and Jennifer pointed to previously raised questions from the UK Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas and his counterpart for Europe, Peter Hustinx, about the effectiveness and relevance of some of today's data protection legislation. Here and across North America and Asia there are calls for a review of the law in this respect.

As an industry, we cannot ignore the fact that an estimated 94% of consumers have no idea or are worried about how their data is being used and who it

is being shared with – this is a staggering statistic! If we don't move to make the whole issue of privacy more transparent, visible and accessible, the danger is that a ground-swell of public opinion will gather pace and trigger the introduction of new, overly restrictive laws.

During the debate, in particular, Jennifer addressed key issues such as the apparent lack of interest in privacy notices by consumers and the need to enable consumers to withdraw consent if they feel their data is being misused via a 'repair mechanism'. Data retention was another hot topic and the question as to how long information should be kept and whether individuals could set their own parameters in this respect was also discussed. In particular, the notion that young people are compromising their own long-term privacy through activity on various social networking sites such as MySpace, Bebo, Facebook and the like, was seen as a clear example of the need for greater control measures.

This important event was made all the more pertinent by breaking news across the UK that morning about the government's plan to implement a database to record all telephone calls, emails and text messages. Understandably, it created even more intensity around the whole debate. Certainly there was wholesale agreement that state intervention would not be able to keep pace with technological change in this arena and that aggressive self-regulation to protect consumers was the way forward.

In conclusion, I think the briefing introduced some very important discussion points and Acxiom will continue to lead and drive the debate not only about the relationship between privacy and technology but also other related data, information management and marketing services topics.

Over the coming months we'll be doing this via a series of round-table meetings in the UK. **Should you wish to join any of these sessions then please email [neil.matthews@acxiom.com](mailto:neil.matthews@acxiom.com)**



Jennifer Barrett, Global Privacy Officer, Acxiom Corporation