

Do 'Twits' care about privacy?

My filename for this document is DMI - Dateline America 48. That means four years of columns, legions of adoring fans, rock star status and perks beyond imagining.

Actually what it means is four years of having an outlet in which to vent, rant, rave and occasionally impart something relevant or humorous.

The personal benefit has been tremendous. Having such an outlet, I haven't had to pay huge fees for therapy for the last four years.

Quite a fair trade off, I'd say. Much has been written about the inaugural iDi Marketers Forum held in New York in March. Sufficient for me say I thought it was a fine event with a lot of useful info imparted and opportunities for networking provided. I always look for the defining moment in a conference. With this event there were at least two. One was an afternoon keynoter blasting US mailers about not using suppression files enough and the waste and ill-will this creates. Absolutely right! Perhaps I'll devote a future column to that. The other, and the



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topic of this column, was when a morning keynoter was talking about social networking and the access to personal data that was voluntarily supplied by the Facebook membership. The issue of privacy was voiced from the audience . . . the response:

"No-one cares about privacy anymore."

Let me repeat - the type of privacy being discussed is the access to personal information that people voluntarily put 'out there'. We are not talking about the pernicious type of identity theft using stolen social security and credit card numbers, employer access to medical health records, and so on.

So, is the above quote an overstatement or was the speaker on to something? I think he is on to something.

Horror stories

Personally, I'm as sick of this topic as I am about CRM. How relevant is privacy and are the 'horror stories' used by those whose jobs depend upon ensuring privacy remains relevant really more *stories* than *horror*.

Facts: new technologies are being adopted with such wild abandon that it is hard to believe these are just passing fads - as once television was considered. And acceptance is crossing all generational lines so it's not just the tweens, teens and those generations ending with letters. And the type of personal information willingly being exchanged through these channels may indeed indicate that the issue of privacy is not as important as it once was. Let's look at this stuff.

Cell phones - yakking loudly in public about private matters.

Cell phones with cameras - any 'private' activity can now be public. Just ask Prince Harry when he chose to dress up as a Nazi for a party.

Cell phones with cameras and Internet access - think YouTube.

Cell phones with cameras = Sext-ing - a recent middle and high school phenomenon among those over-endowed with hormones yet under-endowed with common sense. Can any privacy advocate really argue when kids are taking provocative pictures of themselves and texting these to friends or posting them on the Internet? Do they care about their privacy?

Facebook faithful and all social networks - posting the minutiae of life plus very private thoughts quite willingly

Skype - occasional intrusion. A truly great service yet unsolicited Skype messages from unknown parties do sneak in disguised as real ones.

Twitterers - those who indulge in Twitter by sending endless tweets about nothing at all. Do they care about privacy? Yours or their own?

Chat rooms - have you read the stuff on these? Believe me, there are no secrets, especially in small towns and villages.

Now, ask yourself: Do you really care about this type of privacy? Or is it a very subjective 'caring'? I guess it depends upon whether you have anything to be private about. Right now, in the US, with emphasis on all the real-time forms of social and business communication, many people don't care. Some do; I don't. In fact, I'd love it if a bank called me - texted me - emailed me

DOUG SACKS wonders how much social networkers value their personal data.

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- mailed me - saying they have reviewed my monthly mortgage payment, checked my FICO score and can offer a much better rate and save me \$500 a month. Just sign here. Or a hotel or airline I do business with (or not) offering me deals based upon my travel history and preferences.

Sounds like highly targeted and relevant direct marketing to me: save me money, make life more convenient or give me some simple pleasure and I'll volunteer some information.

Facebook? My Space? Bebo? Not a member but it is all totally voluntary. Same for business sites like Plaxo and Linked-In. I have joined both of these but probably under-utilise their networking capabilities; I have asked a mere fraction of my contacts to connect with me, but just the same, I get daily updates on what people I am 'linked to' are doing, where they are doing it and with whom. Plaxo goes a step further and even tells me about people I am not linked to but are in my email address book.

Do I find this useful? Yes!

A local humourist here suggested that Twitter will never catch on because people who Twitter will be called Twits. (Maybe the UK version of Twitter is Pratter!) He also predicted that there will soon come a day . . . "when you will receive a Tweet asking what you are doing when what you are doing is having sex. And the person sending the tweet is the person you're having sex with!"

That's happened to some of you already hasn't it?

I read that Twitter is very popular with the losers,

deviants, cheats and thieves that inhabit our Congress and Senate. I'm sure these Twits have sent or received these inconvenient tweets!

So is privacy a dead issue?

Of course not. That is an over-statement. But I think it does have to be revisited because it is obviously not as important an issue as privacy lawyers and consultants would have us believe.

Otherwise, no one would be volunteering personal information for immediate release and Facebook wouldn't have more than 200 million

faithful friends. If privacy is a burning issue with any of you, you can always contact me by email, scream at me and tell me I'm wrong. Or Google me and you'll learn all kinds of things.

But remember, I can just as easily Google you or use some other form of electronic espionage. And, if privacy is such a burning issue, ask yourself, just what are you trying to conceal?

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