

Herding Cats: *Persona You*

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SECURE BUSINESS GROWTH

Humans were expected to create or replicate 1.8 zettabytes of information last year¹. For techies, that's the equivalent of telling a finance guy that the government will spend \$3.4 trillion this year and trying to imagine how much money that is. Most of us struggle with visualizing \$1 million, and that's not even that much money anymore. One zettabyte is the equivalent of a million petabytes or a billion terabytes.

That's a lot of information.

We've just started scraping the surface of the legal and privacy issues that come with generating that volume of data. Last month we saw some negative press around a little company called Carrier IQ². They make software that is installed on most mobile devices to help cellular carriers detect and address quality issues in their networks. Depending on how the software is configured, it can just report location information and signal strength, or it could grab call logs with that geo-location information, and potentially dig deeper into the smartphone's logic by revealing web browsing activity and even individual keystrokes³. While the usage of the software can serve a purpose for a carrier to make quality improvements, it also creates massive privacy concerns so great that Representative Edward Markey asked the FTC to take a look into the company.

Imagine the amount of information that could work for you or against you (depending on how it is interpreted and what side of a matter you are on) in a legal proceeding. Are you always tethered to your phone? Maybe instead of a lawyer asking "Where were you on the night of the fifteenth," he can simply present evidence that says "Your phone was there on the night of the fifteenth; here are the contents of four texts you sent to your mother and an alarming web search for 'biodisposal services'."

I can see some big advantages for the private sector to use this kind of information in support of fraud investigations focused on employees or customers. Maybe then you could prove that a company was stealing intellectual property and walking it into a competitor for profit. How would that translate into the legal world? I believe it's largely unknown at this point.

But what about other legal issues associated with the creation of that information? Remember the 1.8 zettabytes? All those tweets and Youtube videos and photos shared on Facebook might also have an impact.

I was reading a blog post the other day where a company required over 250 applicants for one position to submit links that make up their online identity. All of that information is largely considered public, and most companies do basic Google searches on prospective employees to find out information that (for the most part) cannot be asked in an official interview. If your online profile says you are looking for a job that you can park at for a few months before you have to take maternity leave, I might be a little hesitant to hire you for a three year project. I can't ask you if you are pregnant or married in an interview, but I can bet that you have volunteered personal information online somewhere for me to find.

It doesn't just have to be social media, either. News articles from your community can paint an interesting picture as well. They can tell me if you tend to find yourself around

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Extracting Value from Chaos IDC Digital Universe study.*

² *Wired story here: <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/12/carrieriq-ftc-fcc/>*

³ *This is apparently demonstrated in an online video linked from the Wired story.*

crime scenes or if you are running for a local office. Just like retailers want to learn everything they possibly can about their customers, employers want to learn everything they can about their potential employees. It's expensive to fire and replace someone.

This column isn't meant to be a call to action, or really tell you things you probably don't already know (or at least suspect). It's really not meant to cause you to stop and think before you tweet or post a video on Youtube. My goal here was to remind you that with every action you take, you are probably adding to the deluge of data that humans create, and in turn adding to your online persona.

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Branden R. Williams, CISSP, CISM, has been making a name for himself in the Information Technology and Security arena since 1994, as a high school Junior. Now, a graduate of the University of Texas, Arlington earning his BBA in 2000 with a concentration in Marketing and the University of Dallas, where he earned an MBA in Supply Chain Management & Market Logistics, in 2004, Williams is sought after as both an Adjunct Professor and Information Technology & Security Strategy Leader in the corporate world.

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