

Understanding Privacy and Security

About the study

Launched in 1996, EKOS' Rethinking the Information Highway study grew out of a need to better understand how information technologies were reshaping the environment governments and companies were operating within.

Now in its eighth edition and more than 20 surveys later, the study is one of the largest and longest running studies in this area in Canada today. Given its big-picture focus on the full range of issues relating to technology usage, such as the interaction between traditional and electronic service delivery channels and privacy and security-related issues, Rethinking the Information Highway remains one of the most relied upon sources for senior decision makers who are tasked with guiding their organization through what continues to be a rapidly changing environment.

Rethinking the Information Highway is protected by copyright. No part of the report or other findings from the study may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from EKOS Research Associates Inc. Organizations that subscribe to the study are permitted to distribute the findings internally for their own internal uses.

Overview

The privacy landscape continues to undergo changes, some of which are subtle and others that are more dramatic in nature. Ten or 15 years ago, there was no discussion about privacy in the context of the Internet, how loyalty programs track a consumer's every purchase, the growing number of ways that Canadians are acting to defend their privacy, or even identity theft. Today, the Canadian public's outlook on privacy and security-related issues is more complex than ever.

The Broad Privacy Landscape

Personal privacy a concern for Canadians:

Although the majority of Canadians have not experienced an invasion of privacy, almost half believe they have less personal privacy today than they did five years ago. Many Canadians also believe there is some likelihood that they could experience a serious invasion of privacy over the next two years. In fact, only about 4 in 10 believe that the likelihood of experiencing such an invasion is low.

A clear hierarchy in trust and confidence:

Trust and confidence in various institutions to protect personal information vary considerably, with Canadians more likely to express trust in governments and financial institutions than other private sector organizations such as retailers, credit card companies, and telephone companies.

Identity theft in Canada

Identity theft a major source of concern:

While only about 1 in 10 Canadians say they have been a victim of identity theft, the majority consider identity theft to be a serious matter, and Canadians are increasingly concerned about being a victim of identity theft.

Canadians and protecting their privacy

Low levels of awareness of privacy laws:

Despite concern about the privacy and safety of their personal information, Canadians remain unfamiliar with federal and provincial laws that regulate how governments and businesses can use personal information.

Canadians personally taking steps to protect their privacy:

The high levels of concern over their privacy are translating into individual action for many Canadians. Whether it is lodging complaints, a personal paper-shredder, refusing to provide information to businesses or even providing incorrect information, individuals are acting to protect their privacy. In fact, almost 2 in 3 Canadians believe the onus of ensuring personal privacy is "up to individuals."

Privacy, personal information and the private sector

Canadians less comfortable with private sector using their personal information:

Canadians are becoming less comfortable with the private sector using their personal information, and large numbers feel that they have no control over how it is used.

Privacy, personal information and the public sector

Concerns, but some encouraging trends:

The majority of Canadians believe they have no real privacy because government can learn anything it wants about them. Most Canadians also perceive a lack of control over how governments use their personal information.

However, Canadians are significantly more comfortable allowing governments to use their personal information than they are businesses. And Canadians increasingly believe that governments collect only the personal information that is necessary to provide services to Canadians, rather than collecting more information than is necessary.

Canadians are also increasingly optimistic that improvements will be made to the privacy and security of their personal

information when interacting with governments.

Security and the online environment

Canadians remain cautious:

Despite the overall increase in use and comfort with the Internet, there remain surprisingly large numbers of Internet users that have not submitted personal information online. And there is still significant discomfort giving credit card information online even if it is to a well-known store or company.

Results also reveal that a majority of Canadians are comfortable applying for government programs online, however, far fewer are comfortable making an online payment to government.

Security and biometrics

Biometrics seen as useful in combating identity theft:

Despite the highly sensitive nature of biometric information, the majority of Canadians support the use of biometrics as a way of reducing identity theft. The majority of Canadians believe that biometric information in identity documents (such as passports and driver's licenses) would reduce identity theft and make it harder for these documents to be duplicated.

