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Email Appending Erodes Privacy!

By Mike Banks Valentine

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"Pssst! Hey buddy, check dis out over heeya. If ya give me yer database of customas' offline info, I'll give you email addresses to match! Waddaya say pal? \$2 per name, awright?" That's how it might go down in a dark alley in privacy advocates' nightmare, but the reality is that the email appending industry uses bright chirpy banter and photos of clean-cut staffers to tell you the story. The following link will take you to the site of a vendor who explains email appending with Sunday-school innocence.

http://www.accudata.com/s_selfpromotion/email_append.html

Email appending is big business. Here's how it works. A multinational corporation wants to send out an email campaign to it's database of offline customers, say those who purchased their computer printer and filled out the warranty card and mailed it in. The problem? They don't have the email addresses of those customers. Who ya gonna call? Here, let's visit my favorite search engine, Google, and type "email appending" into the search box. Click submit.

There are results 1 – 10 of about 42,300. Search took 0.05 seconds. So much for exhaustive research. Well I suppose that if you wanted to drag things out a bit you could do a few price comparisons. The industry is huge and profitable.

So you want email addresses? Zip us an Excel spreadsheet of your customers names, addresses and phone numbers and we'll send back email addresses to match those customers with. What we won't tell you is that we are missing a good deal of that information ourselves and you'll be paying us to incorporate YOUR information into our

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email database. If you pay us enough, we'll even tell you about those customers lives, their taste in cars, their travel habits and their income levels. And . . . that's not all, if you can provide us with information on their computer system and software purchases, we'll throw in a free recap of their credit history -- No Charge!

DoubleClick was publicly reamed for announcing they would do this by merging the database of a direct marketing company they acquired with their own database of email addresses and the surfing habits of online users. They were sued, they lost millions, they were vilified in the press. Hmmm. Why don't we care that 42,300 others are doing the same thing?

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) has introduced guidelines on the practice. A marketing industry analyst comments in the email marketing publication, "Opt-in News" editorialized on the self-serving nature of the DMA's dance around the term "Opt-In" when they say:

E-mail address appending is the process of adding an individual's e-mail address to that individual's record inside a marketer's existing database. This is accomplished by matching the marketer's database against a third party, permission-based database to produce a corresponding e-mail address. I was amazed that the organization (Direct Marketing Association) danced around privacy issues by creating a loophole extravaganza. The document was written by marketers for marketers, culminating in a classic case of a wolf in sheep's clothing.

If even email marketing industry publications have strong words for the practice of email appending, what should the public think of the meticulous gathering of personal information by marketers into vast databases of assembled information that the public knows nothing about, gave no permission or consent to assemble that information, and would likely disapprove if they did know the practice was going on behind their back.

May 20, 2002, a financial privacy bill was defeated a second time in California after banking and insurance industry lobbyists contributed \$5 Million toward politicians who opposed (or refused to vote on) a bill denying them the right to trade and sell Californians private financial information. Governor Gray Davis received nearly \$1 Million (\$880,000) of that amount after agreeing to veto any financial privacy bill that crossed his desk.

Californians have some very strong privacy advocates in the California

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Senate, like Senator Jackie Speier, who introduced various versions of her financial privacy bill repeatedly, only to have banking and insurance industry lobbyists jump in to change the outcome.

Online business is contributing dramatically to the erosion of privacy by assembling personal, private, sensitive information about each and every customer simply by seeking the email addresses of their customers when they didn't receive it from the customer personally, but through email appending services. Those services may have only had a name and email address to match before the online business unknowingly contributed all the data they held about their customers to the email appending firm doing the research.

The automotive department at Sears offers up name address, phone number, car model, make and repair history to an email appending firm when they request customers email addresses from those appending firms. They get the email address, but have just contributed to

further privacy erosion in order to send an email about their lube, oil and filter change special.

The appending firm deals with a bank, a computer superstore and a discount warehouse and now has information that was inaccessible to them before. I could be argued that the businesses should be paid for the information they have given up to gain the email address. But they don't realize what they are doing in most cases. Even if they do understand the privacy invasion involved here, they are unlikely to care. They just want the email address to spam, er, market to their customers!

I wonder how much they'd charge to remove my information from all those databases? I don't think I could afford to buy back my privacy once you add up all the money spent to violate it.

Mike Banks ValentineI-Privacy Discussion ListProtecting Privacy is Good for Business<http://www.adventive.com/lists/iprivacy/summary.html>SUBSCRIBE: <mailto:i-privacy-join-request@list.adventive.com>

I'm Subscribing, Not Buying Don't Make It Personal

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If I'm subscribing to your ezine or newsletter online my email-address should be sufficient. So why do you require* my full name/address/birth date/annual-income/etc? You post a Privacy Statement on your website, but where is my privacy?

Next, I get email from you with a heading "Hello John" but I'm Robert so this must be SPAM, I then hit delete or reply with "Unsubscribe" in the subject-line.

Asking prospects for personal histories is call gathering demographics, it can also be turn-off from subscribing.

If I'm buying products or services on your site, then I'm willing to type in the minimum information to satisfy my credit cards status.

Now, what's your incentive for my repeat business?

Robert Wardrick is founder of <http://capcitymall.com> Happy Holidays...Shop Early "One-Stop Fun Shopping & Savings from Home" tm <mailto:custserv@capcitymall.com>



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