

How the privacy debate will shift in 2020



By [Grant Lapping](#)

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Data privacy and protection are likely to be high on the agenda for 2020 in the wake of Facebook-Cambridge Analytica and other data scandals. These controversies have prompted regulators and consumers alike to question how much personal data big tech companies gather, how they put it to work, and how they store and manage it.



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This incident saw Cambridge Analytica harvest the personal data of millions of people's Facebook profiles without their consent and use it for microtargeted political campaigns. It's an example of how the speed of change in the technology market outpaces the ability of lawmakers and regulators to keep up.

The enactment of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018 in response to personal data privacy concerns was a watershed moment, setting a benchmark for global data protection regulation that is likely to be emulated in many parts of the world. Yet the debate has already moved on.

Edward Snowden – the NSA-whistle blower living in exile in Russia after exposing America's mass surveillance programmes – for example, argues that we should not be looking only at protection of data. We should also ask whether this personal data should be collected in the first place, given that leaks or abuse of the data are inevitable.

He says that the underlying assumption of GDPR and similar data privacy laws is that "the collection of data in the first place was proper, that it was appropriate and that it doesn't represent a threat or danger. That it's okay to spy on your customers or your citizens so long as it never leaks."

Reframing the debate

This point is one that digital marketers, regulators, big tech and privacy advocates are likely to vigorously debate in the years to come. It shifts the question to whether Google, Facebook, Netflix, Amazon and other programmatic based platforms are correct to collect your information in the first instance rather than whether they are doing enough to protect your data from bad actors like Cambridge Analytica.

This reframing of the debate could have profound implications for digital marketing if it becomes increasingly difficult for programmatic platforms to collect data that enables brands to run highly targeted advertising campaigns. We could see lawmakers question whether the way these platforms gather and use data is truly in customers' best interests.

As powerful as these capabilities are, it is perhaps also time for marketers to question whether they should amass as much personal data as they can without asking whether their customers are in favour of it. Many leading brands believe that they could benefit from shifting from mass collection of data towards collecting data only with customers' consent.

The obvious drawback is that brands have less customer data to use for their targeted campaigns; the upside is that marketers can build trust among their customers by asking for permission and being transparent about how they collect and use data. They can overlay mass data with surveys and other tools to not only understand what customers are doing but why they are doing it.

Data captured via tags embedded within sites for targeted campaigns is still the most effective way to gather vast amounts of client data quickly. It will always be more efficient than survey-based data, but if regulation starts to move from protection to collection it is worth building the capability now in anticipation of that possibility.

Focus on the data that matters

Marketers can also focus on the most salient data rather than gathering information for its own sake. Consider the example of Facebook likes. Some marketers think that getting a lot of 'likes' on Facebook is a great way to gather a captive audience of good, qualified prospects. But one needs to ask how these likes were acquired and whether those that 'liked' to enter a competition are genuine leads and fans.

It's not necessary to gather 'likes' to market your product or service to a user on Facebook. You can reach him or her through a range of more precise targeting criteria that are far better qualified. I would rather have 80% less likes on my page if I knew that remaining 20% were genuine brand ambassadors.

One way to get richer data is to use survey data consumers knowingly provided to target ads on platforms such as Facebook. This can build trust with the customer, since they will have more control over how their data is used to target messages to them. The brand can still leverage the data the platform collects about the user, while using the data the user-supplied for more accurate and transparent engagements.

We work closely with platforms such as Google and Facebook, and believe their intentions are generally good. However, marketers also need to keep ahead of the evolving data privacy debate and position themselves for the best practices of tomorrow. Those that get it right will be able to both target their customers at a highly granular level and build trust in their brands by using data in a manner that respects concerns of consumers and regulators.

ABOUT GRANT LAPPING

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