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This is Jill Duffy, with Community Comment

Once upon a time, and not so very long ago, protecting your personal information was a fairly standard practice. But today, many people blindly and willfully provide information when it is requested, often times unquestioningly.

As a child, I was told of the importance of guarding one's Social Security Number. Shortly after the introduction of barcodes in the 1970's there were wild rumors decrying that all citizens would eventually be tattooed or 'chipped' so Big Brother could track their movements and habits.

In truth, an individual's private information is systematically and already readily available to most anyone who is interested.

Increasingly there is a treasure chest of information on most individuals because of the explosion in smart phones, social networking, blogs, cloud computers, and geotagging location apps. These sites gather personal information by tracking key words and using algorhythms to develop profiles. And while one may delete information, the raw data remains with the provider.

My Dad spent many years with Ma Bell in communications research and development, and privacy in the electronic world has long been a topic of conversation. This week's conversation involved neighbors.whitepages.com.

Remember when Google's Street Map project created a stir a few years ago with their camera outfitted car that recorded every major city, and small town street? Enter an address, and you are viewing Any Street USA. It's pretty cool. A little disconcerting, but pretty cool.

Well, Street Map has got nothin' on Neighbors.whitepages.com. Type in an address and up pops a high resolution satellite photo of the house...and that of all of the immediate neighbors, along with their names/addresses and phone numbers. If you're curious to know more personal information, just visit Spokeo.com

Spokeo is a real time search engine that collects and cross references data from online and offline sources and often includes property and wealth values of individuals.

Pandora's box was opened some time ago, and our Congress remains ill prepared to undertake a comprehensive examination that could lead to legislation to protect personal privacy. Existing legislation has been adopted in a piece-mealed fashion by focusing on areas of concern such as the 1998 Children's Online Privacy Protection Act or cyber-security standards to protect our nations power grid.

But otherwise we are left to fend for ourselves.

So how does one protect their privacy especially when more and more of us are switching to smartphones for everything from surfin' the net, paying bills and downloading apps? First by understanding that in exchange for the 'free' internet, the collected currency is information. Decide your privacy level settings to manage cookies and periodically clear them; be conscious of web security, request your removal from public databases, read those privacy notices before you click yes. When paying bills online, make sure the sites are encrypted and remember YOU decide what information to reveal, when, why and to whom.

We should watch carefully the European Union as they consider the "Right To Be Forgotten" which will recognize that protection of personal information should be a fundamental right, and especially the rights of living individuals to privacy and processing of personal data.

This has been Community Comment with Jill Duffy