

# UK survey reveals identity theft fears

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Researchers from the Information Security Group (ISG) at Royal Holloway, University of London worked together with UK online to conduct a survey of privacy attitudes and behaviours. Focusing on our concerns about privacy while using the internet, the survey reveals that online identity theft is currently the greatest fear for internet users.

Other key concerns relate to individuals having their [personal information](#) compromised. Among these concerns, finance features prominently, as does the exposure of personal information and the potential for individuals and companies to misrepresent themselves. Gender, length of internet experience and education levels all contribute to affecting the level of general concern. The tracking of web pages visited by an individual is predominantly regarded as either harmful (43.1%) or both helpful and harmful (39.7%). Very few regard it as

purely beneficial.

These results form part of the backdrop to a project called ‘Visualisation and Other Methods of Expression’ (VOME), which aims to produce methods and tools for negotiating and engaging with on-line privacy and consent. These tools could help service users define, agree and check levels of privacy when using the internet and might help service providers respond more effectively to the service user’s [privacy concerns](#).

Dr Lizzie Coles-Kemp, VOME project manager and ISG member, comments, “The survey results are a useful stepping stone to helping us understand the bigger picture when it comes to on-line privacy practices and behaviours. We look forward to developing a more complete picture with the results from our qualitative fieldwork.”

VOME is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the Technology Strategy Board, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). The VOME partners are the ISG, Cranfield and Salford Universities, Sunderland City Council and Consult Hyperion.

The survey was developed by ISG researchers from existing privacy scales which have been previously used to measure privacy attitudes and behaviours. The use of existing scales enables VOME researchers to compare their results with previous surveys of this nature. The survey was administered via an online platform known as ConfirmIT provided by UK online. Participants were recruited from UK online’s research panel known as “myopinion”.

The total number of valid responses for the survey was 1048. Of the 1048 respondents, 49.8% (523) were male and 50.2% (525) were female and the mean age was 41.0 years (range: 18 - 82 years).

Although a large proportion of respondents had not personally experienced an invasion of privacy, many had heard or read about the use and potential misuse of customers' personal information collected on the web. 45% indicated that they had heard or read about such incidents "somewhat frequently" and 16% had heard or read about such incidences "very frequently". 31% had heard or read about such incidences "not too frequently" and only 4% had not heard or read about such incidences at all.

VOME is currently undertaking qualitative research to explore the trends identified in the survey in order to develop a deeper understanding of the privacy protection practices and how these can be improved to become more usable by wider sections of the community.

Professor Peter Wild, Director of the ISG comments that, "VOME is an exciting extension to the research portfolio of the ISG adding an essential social science dimension to it. This aspect of information security research has become vitally important as privacy and identity issues impinge on the everyday lives of the public. We are proud to be contributing in this way to society through VOME."

Copies of the [survey](#) and further information about VOME can be obtained from the VOME website: [www.vome.org.uk](http://www.vome.org.uk)

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