

Security expert: Data is the pollution of the Information Age

May 6 2010, By Victor Godinez

During a panel discussion at the recent Worldwide Cybersecurity Summit in Dallas that otherwise was as dry as a highway in the Sahara, security guru Bruce Schneier made a provocative argument.

He contended that just as pollution was the unfortunate byproduct of the Industrial Revolution, data is the waste product of the [digital revolution](#).

And just like pollution, all the data we generate during our lives never degrades.

He noted that almost every transaction and interaction now generates data.

Whether it's buying a product with a [debit card](#) when we used to pay with cash, or communicating via [text message](#) or [e-mail](#) when we used to just make a phone call, activities that previously left no trace now generate a significant digital trail.

"It's strange to us to think of getting dumped on the Internet. But for the younger generation, it's perfectly normal," Schneier said. "And it will still be normal in 20 years when that record of getting dumped is still out there on the Internet."

Schneier said the cost of storing all that data is now so low that the companies that manage those transactions and communications no longer delete old data. They archive it forever.

Figuring out how to manage all that digital flotsam and come up with rules for how and with whom we want to share it is a [social responsibility](#), he said. Otherwise, companies will develop their own rules to sell our personal information to the highest bidder.

"We think we're Google's customers, but we're not," he said. "We're Google's product that they sell to their customers."

Schneier said the current generation needs to act quickly.

"Our grandkids will judge us on how we managed data," he said.

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