

Explosion in online consumer data collection poses major threat, expert says

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Online data collection tools are available to people or firms who may not use them correctly or ethically, warns Dr Terry Beed. Credit: Flickr/thatgrumguy

A marketing expert at the University of Sydney Business School has warned of a mounting threat to privacy posed by a massive increase in consumer information being amassed in a way that does not comply with the code governing data collection by market and social researchers in Australia.

Honorary Associate Professor of Marketing, Dr Terry Beed, says that market research tools such as SurveyMonkey are now readily available to individuals or firms who may not use them correctly or ethically.

Dr Beed has recently completed a major review of the Market and Social Research Privacy Code administered by the Association of Market and Social Research Organisations (AMSRO) and co-regulated by the Australian Privacy Commissioner.

His warning coincides with Privacy Awareness Week (28 April to 4 May) - an effort by authorities across the [Asia Pacific Region](#) to boost consumer understanding of the mounting threat to privacy.

The University of Sydney Business School is partnering with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner to promote Privacy Awareness Week ahead of changes to next year's changes to [privacy laws](#).

"The ground is changing under our feet," Dr Beed said. "There has been an explosion in the amount of personal data being gathered in the [digital environment](#) and it has revolutionised the way we go about marketing goods and services."

"However, much of this data is being gathered by people with no background in market and social research," Dr Beed added. "It is important that they are sensitised about working with consumers' personal information in accordance with the [privacy regulations](#)."

Dr Beed says much of this information is being onsold to marketers often via data brokers without the knowledge or consent of consumers and in possible breach of the Privacy Codes, which are approved by the Australian Privacy Commissioner.

"Marketers are now using age, gender or product preferences to design highly targeted advertising," Dr Beed said. "While this may be annoying to some consumers it is relatively harmless. Of far greater concern is data that might be related to incomes, debt levels or health profiles

which is gathered and on sold without any warning to the consumer."

"Alarming, data analysis tools are becoming more sophisticated and are enabling the reconstruction of individual consumer profiles from a diverse range of sources," he added

Despite the dangers, a recent survey found that very few Australians were fully aware of privacy protections in this country.

The survey, conducted by AMSRO which represents the established market research sector, found that 25 percent of Australians claimed to have no knowledge at all of how companies were required to protect their [privacy](#).

Provided by University of Sydney

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