

A Google Glass half full

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It's not news that the seemingly never-ending stream of new and disruptive technologies is affecting every facet of society. When innovative, appealing and easy-to-use technologies come on to the market most of us adopt them almost without hesitation.

But our love affair with new technology can leave users exposed and legislators and regulators scrambling for their rule books.

The global launch of Google Glass has already raised questions about how this gadget could run roughshod over our right to privacy. The glasses can provide GPS, make phone calls, search the web, send text messages and take photos and video. It's the last two – photos and video – that have raised [eyebrows](#) among regulators, who are worried Google Glass wearers will intentionally or accidentally record video and audio conversations without the consent of those being recorded.

How much easier will it be to take photographs of other people's children at the beach, record intimate conversations that could be used to blackmail someone, or breach workplace employee confidentiality contracts when you have such an unassuming gadget to hand?

In a recent bipartisan letter to Google CEO Larry Page, the US Congress demanded answers to a range of questions about security and privacy, which as of the date of writing this story, had not been answered by Page.

But the benefits of technologies that allow people to do things their

parents couldn't even dream of can't be ignored. Because of smartphones, spectators at this year's Boston Marathon gave photographs and video footage to the police that helped investigators identify and find the suspects. In the US, a smartphone app is being developed that traces a product's ownership all the way to the parent company so consumers can make ethical purchasing decisions.

All this means companies such as Google, Apple and Facebook hold commanding positions when it comes to reshaping the landscape in which we lead our lives. The problem is, their global reach and influence is challenging governments, regulators and those wanting to stop and think about whether there are any negatives associated with new technology.

Regulators and politicians may be tempted to regulate against this kind of technology but history is littered with prohibition failures, such as the national ban on the sale, production and transportation of alcohol in the US in the 1920s.

There are already some laws in place that would curb unauthorised photography and video recordings by Google Glass, such as the Surveillance Devices Act 2004 (Australia) that prohibits recording a private conversation without the consent of the parties involved. But that doesn't mean people won't try to get away with it.

There is also a risk that Google Glass could be hacked. Google has invited users to hack its product, a cost-effective way of getting others to test the product's security capabilities.

As technology developers and marketers increase their share of your personal digital footprint – that indelible record of your every interaction with the electronic world – ultimately the only way you can ensure your privacy is protected is to be as informed as possible. But the chances of

everyone being able to keep up to date with the digital revolution, in a world as fast moving as this one, is quite another matter.

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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