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[Beating a Dead Privacy Horse](#)

January 14th, 2010

By Fran Maier

President and Executive Chair
TRUSTe

Back in October we responded to the claim that “privacy is dead” in a blog post entitled “[Toward Privacy 2.0](#)“. This notion has resurfaced and received considerable press attention in the past few days. Rather than repeat ourselves we’d like to steer you toward a recent blog [post](#) by Julian Sanchez of the Cato Institute that provides another intelligent critique of this notion that privacy has somehow been blown to smithereens by the proliferation of personal information on the Internet. Sanchez writes:

“It’s easy to look at all the information that comes up in a simple Google search for someone’s name and conclude that privacy is dead. But I think it’s at least as significant that the crucial first page of results is likely to consist of information that the individuals themselves have chosen to make public: Blogs, Facebook or MySpace profiles, Twitter accounts, Last.fm pages, YouTube channels. A similar inquiry a generation ago surely would have been much more laborious and less fruitful, but it also would have consisted to a far greater extent of what others had to say about the target: gossip first and foremost, but perhaps also press mentions, official records, and so on. It’s not that such information is now less accessible, but for the average person, it’s pushed to the margin by what we’ve chosen to disclose. That’s not an unmixed blessing—some may feel as though this merely traps them in a kind of openness arms race—but neither is it the privacy death-spiral a purely quantitative analysis might suggest.”

Privacy is not anonymity, it isn’t secrecy, and, as Sanchez smartly observes, it’s “not just a function of the raw quantity of information available about each of us”. Privacy is fundamentally about choice. And [choice about information sharing](#) is alive and well on the Internet. How we exercise that choice is up to each and everyone one of us.

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- 1. Allen Brandt | January 15th, 2010 at 6:26 am

It would be nice if the reporters stopped sensationalizing this as a black or white issue, since it’s much more subtle than that.

If I don't know one's bank account numbers or anything about your medical condition, then those are your private things. Privacy is not "dead" at all, is it? Of course, if you choose to talk about your medical treatment and condition a blog or social network site, then you have chosen to make that part of your life more public.

We need to educate people about using the tools that are available in an intelligent, thoughtful way, rather than scare tactics.

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