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Press Release - 13 January 2003

Privacy Fears on the Increase, warns Data Protection Commissioner

Public Anxiety linked to 'Trust Deficit' Irish people are growing increasingly concerned about the erosion of their personal privacy, according to a survey published today by the Data Protection Commissioner, Mr Joe Meade. Intrusive business practices, fears about internet privacy, and a lack of information about Government initiatives have contributed to what Mr Meade termed a "trust deficit" that could undermine Ireland's progress towards e-commerce.

Key Findings – Privacy a High Priority, Fears on the Increase

The key findings of the survey, which was conducted by Millward Brown IMS Ltd, are as follows:

- Irish people value their privacy highly, ranking it higher even than issues such as consumer protection, ethics in public office, and equality in the workplace. Only crime prevention was given a similarly high priority by the public.
- Financial records have a higher privacy value than medical records
- Three out of four Irish adults believe that businesses regularly encroach on our privacy
- Irish people share a similar mistrust of Government agencies – just over half of adults trust Government agencies to deal with personal details in a fair and proper manner, with one in four expressing distrust
- People feel more insecure about the Internet than in the past. Most people (56%) agree that 'if you use the internet, your privacy is threatened', compared with 37% in a 1997 survey. The proportion who 'strongly agree' with this statement has doubled from 14% to 28%.
- Most people prefer not to receive unsolicited direct marketing. While many people tend to be somewhat indifferent to direct mailings to the home, people are more firmly opposed to receiving unsolicited phone calls at home, and to receiving unsolicited e-mails and SMS messages.
- Comparing these results with a similar 1997 survey, people's anxieties about intrusions into their privacy have increased. Expressions of unease about business practices and about internet use have all increased significantly over the period.

Privacy-Proofing Initiatives Are Needed, says Commissioner

"As the information society proceeds apace, public unease about new technologies needs to be firmly laid to rest," commented Mr Meade. "This survey shows that public anxieties are, if anything, on the increase." The Commissioner said that both the Government and the business community, as well as his Office, have a role to play in addressing these fears. "Data Protection Law is there to provide the assurances that the public

demand. For my part, I will be re-doubling my enforcement efforts in 2003, to ensure that people's legal rights in this area are upheld. For example, I will be launching privacy audits, and exercising a range of new powers open to me under the new Data Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2002, due to be enacted shortly. I would also urge the business community and the Government to build privacy-proofing initiatives into the way they interact with the public. Information, transparency and consent are the touchstones of good practice in both the public and private sectors, and the success of e-business will ultimately depend upon public credibility."

DETAILED RESULTS OF SURVEY

Prepared in Collaboration with Millward Brown IMS Ltd.

Methodology

A sample of 1,203 respondents aged 15+ were interviewed on the Millward Brown IMS Omnibus Survey. This survey is designed to be representative (in terms of age, sex, social class, region and area) of the adult population aged 15 and over living in the Republic of Ireland. All respondents were interviewed face to face, in their own homes, by trained and experienced Millward Brown IMS interviewers. Fieldwork was conducted between 24th September and 4th October 2002. In order to maintain comparability with previous research undertaken in October 1997, the findings set out below are based only on those aged 18 years or over (1,098 respondents).

1. Irish People Value their Privacy

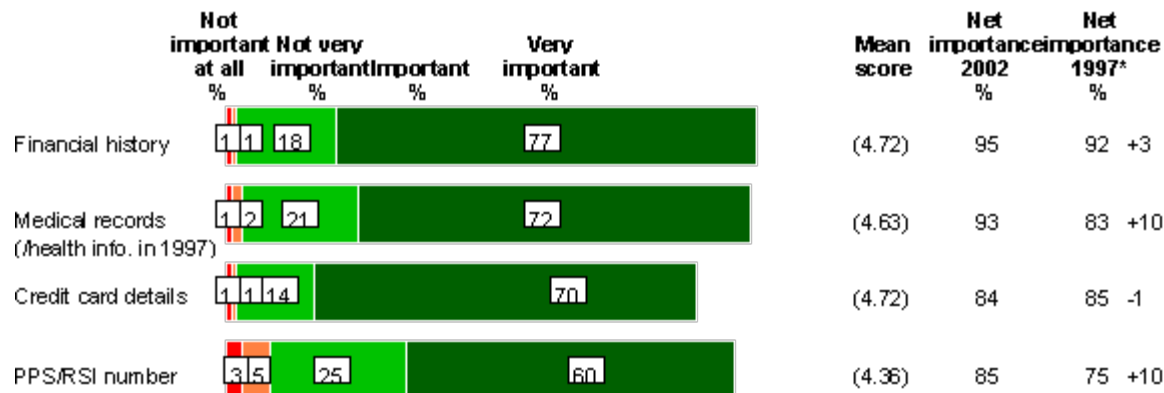
The survey shows that Irish people place a high value on their right to privacy. "Privacy of personal information" ranks higher even than the "protection of consumer rights," or "ethics in public office". 81% of adults thought that personal privacy was "very important", with a further 17% rating it "important" – making a 98% positive rating in total. Consumer protection was rated "very important" by 76% of people (and as "important" by a further 20%), whereas "ethics in public office" garnered a 71% "very important" rating (with a further 22% rating it as "important"). Only "crime prevention" received a similarly high rating by the public, with a "very important" rating of 84%, and an "important" rating of 15%. "Equality in the workplace" received a 75% "very important" rating with a further 19% rating it as "important").

2. Financial Records More Sensitive Than Medical Records

Perhaps surprisingly, the survey showed that Irish people place a higher privacy value on their personal financial records than on their medical records. 77% of adults rated their "financial history" as "very important" (with a further 18% rating it as "important"), compared with a 72% "very important" rating for "medical records" (with a further 21% "important" rating). Other items of personal information with strong privacy ratings were credit card details (70% very important, 14% important), and the PPS Number (60% very important, 25% important). The personal telephone number was rated "very important" by 51% of adults, and as "important" by a further 28%.

PRIVACY OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IS BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT

Base: All Adults 18+



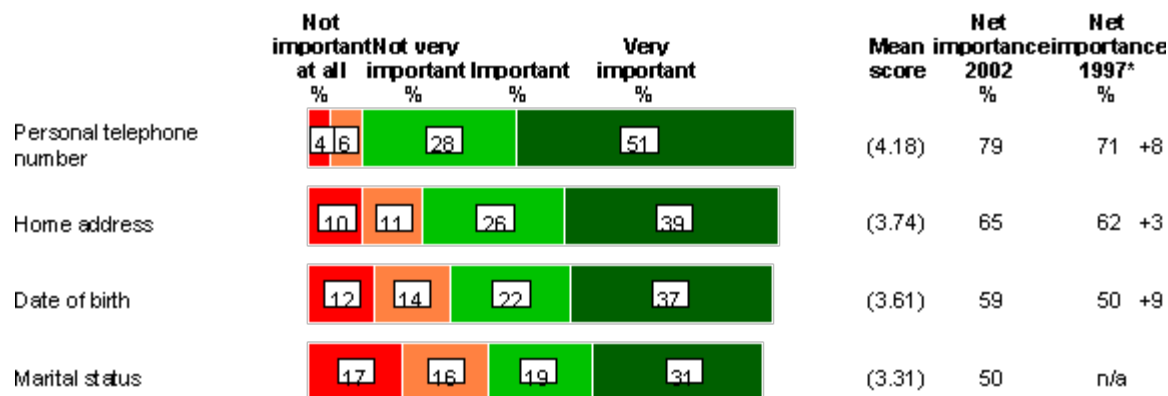
*LMR October 1997

Q. For each of the items that I read out please tell me how important or not it is to you to keep that information private by not revealing it to others. Now starting with your ...

Other personal details received lower privacy ratings: date of birth (37% very important, 22% important), and marital status (31% very important, 19% important).

PRIVACY OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IS BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT

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Q. For each of the items that I read out please tell me how important or not it is to you to keep that information private by not revealing it to others. Now starting with your ...

3. Businesses Need to be More Privacy Friendly

Three out of four adults believe that businesses are encroaching upon personal privacy. 76% of people agreed with the statement that "businesses regularly want to know more about me than they need to" – a significant increase since 1997, when the comparable figure was 60%. More worryingly, the proportion of people who

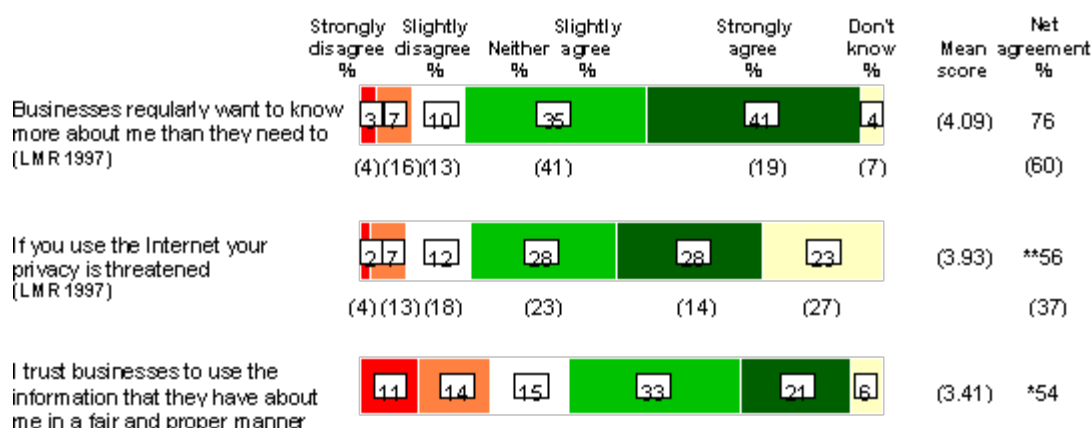
agree strongly with this statement has more than doubled from 19% in 1997 to 41% now. This negative perception of business prevailed across all age and social class cohorts, with the professional/managerial (AB) group (85%) and married men (84%) particularly vociferous in this regard.

On the other hand, around half of adults (54%) tended to agree that they *"trust businesses to use the information they have about me in a fair and proper manner."* One in every four (25%) actively disagreed with this statement, while the remaining one in five were either ambivalent or did not know. The most sceptical were men (30% disagreeing), AB's (34%) and Dublin residents (34%).

Reaction to the notion that *'it is worth giving up some privacy to enable businesses to provide better services'* was somewhat more polarised, with quite similar proportions of all adults either agreeing (43%) or disagreeing (37%) with this proposition. Looking across the demographic groups, the balance of opinion in favour of this statement was highest among those in the lowest socio-economic group (DE), and residents of Leinster (excluding Dublin) and Connaught/Ulster. Opposition tended to outweigh agreement among Dublin residents and single women.

BUSINESSES ARE ENCROACHING ON PERSONAL

Base: All Adults 18+ (1098)



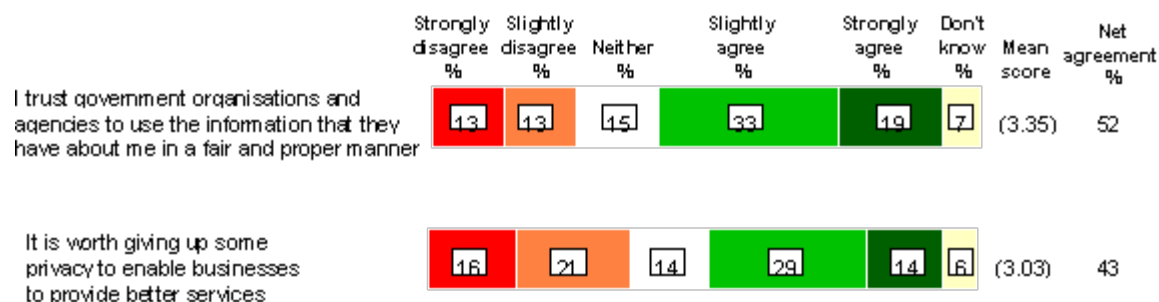
Q. I am going to read out some statements which other people have made about their privacy. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement using one of the phrases on this card.

4. Similar Mistrust of Government Agencies

Interestingly, the general public appeared no more trusting of government organisations and agencies than they were of businesses in relation to the proper use of their personal information. Overall, just over half of adults (52%) agreed to a greater or lesser extent that they *'trust government organisations and agencies to use the information that they have about me in a fair and proper manner'*. One in every four (26%) disagreed.

BUSINESSES ARE ENCRACING ON PERSONAL

Base: All Adults 18+ (1098)



Q. I am going to read out some statements which other people have made about their privacy. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement using one of the phrases on this card.

5. Privacy and the Internet

People's fears of the internet seem to have grown in the last number of years. 56% of adults now agree that *'if you use the Internet your privacy is threatened'*, compared with 37% in the 1997 survey, and the proportion that 'strongly agree' with this statement has doubled from 14% to 28%. Thus, although a similar proportion as in 1997 (23% now versus 27% then) remained uncertain (presumably through lack of knowledge and experience) of the impact of the Internet on their privacy, these latest results show that Internet users have definitely become more rather than less chary in the intervening period of the risks to their privacy.

People Are Hostile to Intrusive Direct Marketing

Most people tended to be opposed to, rather than in favour of, unsolicited direct marketing. Predictably, because of its more immediately intrusive nature, resistance tended to be highest to direct marketing attempts over the home telephone, with more than one in every three adults (36%) describing themselves as 'very unhappy' about this selling approach and three in five overall (60%) opposed to some extent. Antipathy to this form of direct marketing was highest among ABC1's (67%) and Dublin (67%) and Munster (70%) residents.

As regards direct marketing by e-mail or over the internet - this question was relevant for only two out of three respondents - the level of discontent was high, with 55% opposed to receiving communications this way. Middle class (ABC1) and older respondents (25 years and upwards) were the most resistant.

Focusing on those who gave an opinion about direct marketing messages via SMS/text to mobile phones, over half (54%) pronounced themselves unhappy with this type of communication. One in every four were unconcerned one way or the other and one in eight were happy to receive such communications. Young people (18 – 24 years) who tend to be the most assiduous users of mobile phones, appeared less concerned, while those in the 25 – 49 year span were the most likely to reject this method of direct marketing, as also were middle class (ABC1) respondents and Dublin and Munster residents.

Although a substantial proportion (48%) were also opposed to some degree to direct marketing through the post, this medium was also the most likely to elicit indifference - *'don't mind one way or the other'* (32%). Consequently, relative to the other forms of communication measured in the survey, direct marketing communication through the post is perhaps less contentious or intrusive. The oldest age group (65+ years) appeared the most unhappy about this type of direct marketing. Regionally, Dublin and Munster residents were also the most strongly opposed, perhaps reflecting a proliferation of 'junk mail' in more urbanised areas.

ENDS

Media Queries:

Mr Seán Sweeney

Telephone (01) 874 8544

Fax: (01) 874 5405

e-mail: ssweeney@dataprotection.ie

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Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Canal House, Station Road, Portarlinton, Co. Laois, R32 AP23, Ireland.
Phone +353 57 868 4800 & +353 761 104 800 | LoCall 1890 25 22 31 | Fax +353 57 868 4757 | email
info@dataprotection.ie