

Only One In Ten Adults Trust The Government With Their Personal Information

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- Survey commissioned by Data Encryption Systems (DES) uncovers startling lack of trust in government

Taunton, UK - Tuesday 18th March 2008 – Data Encryption Systems Limited (DES), the UK-based leader in software copyright protection, data encryption, secure messaging and data storage solutions, has today released the results from an online omnibus survey of over a thousand UK adults, revealing that only one in ten respondents trust the government with their personal data.

The results demonstrate that on the face of it, the British public seem very trusting, with 74 percent of those surveyed stated that they would hand over personal information, such as; contact details, date of birth, marital status, health information and children's details. People rated their families as the group they would be most willing to trust, but it is interesting to note that banks and employers come above friends. However, only 1 in 10 adults trust the government with their personal information. In fact, almost as many people (9 percent) would trust an online retailer as would trust the government.

Commissioned by DES in February 2008, the report was compiled by Dynamic Markets and hosted by ICM Research. 1048 adults aged 18+ were interviewed for this online omnibus survey, to provide a benchmark on public opinion, as David Tomlinson, Managing Director for DES, explains:

“Following the rash of data protection mishaps last year and the subsequent press attention, we were getting increasing interest in our encryption product, DESlock+. This is why we decided to bench-test the market and see where the public stood on data protection issues. Our product is designed to be used by anyone and everyone, so we thought it would be interesting to see how the non-IT world views encryption.

There's no escaping it these days, with the increasing dependence on IT and the rise of identity theft, data protection is no longer just a problem for the CIO, but something everyone has to consider. Every time you pay online, register your taxes, or apply for a passport, you are taking a gamble with your personal information – so knowing who to trust is a burning question.”

The introduction of ID cards

The survey addresses the introduction of ID cards in the UK, and demonstrated that opinion on this matter is still divided, with 41 percent in favour of identity cards and 40 percent against them, and 19 percent are undecided.

These results deal yet another blow to the governments plans for a national identity card system after the return of Sir James Crosby's independent review, 'Challenges and opportunities in identity assurance', which was commissioned two years ago by the Treasury. The report, which was released on 6th March, criticises the way the identity card system is being rolled out and accuses the government of adopting an "uncoordinated" approach to the problem of identity assurance. The Crosby report also coincided with the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith's, announcement that the government is to delay the widespread introduction of ID cards until 2012. Although, those working with children, at airports, or in

specific sensitive roles and locations will be brought into the systems in 2009.

Can the government be trusted?

One of the major changes Jacqui Smith has introduced to the ID scheme is that people applying for passports will no longer be forced to have an ID card whether they want one or not, although their details will still be entered in to a National Identity Register. This register will hold details such as: name, address, gender, date and place of birth, immigration status, fingerprints, iris patterns, and facial image – but, in light of recent events, can people really trust the government with this type of information?

72 percent of people who are against ID cards, or remain on the fence about them, feel that they do not trust the government to protect their personal data. Among these, 93 percent say this is because the government has a poor track record of looking after citizens' data. And almost as many (87 percent) think there is a lack of competence with personal data security in government. While 69 percent think the government has a poor regard for citizens' privacy.

The second biggest issue for 65 percent of people is that they worry that their personal data will fall into the wrong hands. Additionally, almost 1 in 2 (49 percent) feel that ID cards will be an intrusion into their personal lives.

The technology's there, why not use it?

In an interview with Radio 4's Today Programme Jacqui Smith claimed that as the ID card databases will be online, it won't be possible to hack into them. However this is a view that is strongly contested in the security community and one that demonstrates a lack of understanding of IT security.

It is not surprising that people are dubious of the government, when last year almost 37 million had their personal data compromised due to negligence. Much of this could have been prevented had the proper technology been in place. For example, the government attracted a lot of criticism for failing to encrypt the data on the two discs that were lost by HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenues & Customs).

The results show that these events may have had an impact on public opinion, as over two thirds (67 percent) of respondents said that they do not trust the government's technology. Furthermore a damning 56 percent simply don't trust civil servants with their personal data.

Data protection is an issue that affects any business that handles sensitive information. Last month there were reports that the Lords are to re-open an inquiry into e-crime and personal data security, opening the possibility of new data protection laws, such as those in the US, which force companies to warn their customers if a data breach involving their information has taken place. If these were to take, would private business be ready for the fallout?

A staggering 64 percent of workers who use a computer at work say they deal with what they consider to be sensitive or private information relating to clients, customers and staff. But only just over one third of people (37 percent) say they are given the means of encrypting this sensitive information so that when

necessary, even the company or contract IT staff cannot readily access it. 52 percent admit they are not given this sort of encrypting capability and another 11 percent say they do not know if they are or not.

It's so easy

Cherry Taylor, Managing Director for Dynamic Markets comments: "On the face of it, these results seem surprising and controversial as they highlight such a high level of mistrust in government. However in the wider context, when you consider the series of data protection incidents last year, maybe it's not as shocking as you would first imagine. This is a problem we have seen echoed in other research, which suggests that it might be an issue the government really needs to address."

David Tomlinson concludes: "This research shows how damaging negative press surrounding a data breach can be – and it can be so easily prevented. For example our product, DESlock+, can help organisations to protect against data theft by offering simple, yet extremely powerful, encryption of documents, folders, disks and removable storage media, and computer systems. The survey highlights the fact that there is a need to educate the public at large about data protection methods, such as encryption.

Data has to be taken out of the building, and information has to travel around and encryption is the obvious answer, but there are numerous stories of customers struggling – and failing - to use encryption effectively. Its perceived user-unfriendliness and fears of being left high and dry without their data has left users willing to take a risk, preferring to carry their unencrypted laptops with them at all times. Yet really, using encryption is as easy as driving a car. You don't need to understand the technology to be able to use it."

For a full copy of the research, 'Love All, Trust A Few', please visit DES's website at: www.des.co.uk.

For further information:

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