

OFF THE GRID



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Lately, there has been a lot of media attention for situations in which our privacy is under attack. From C.I.A. tapping scandals and cookie regulations to the Dutch public transport chip card hacking. With Google Streetview driving around our neighbourhood and in the nearby future the usage of Google Glass, will it be possible for us as a private person to dive under the radar and get off the grid? Or will we live in a permanent state of 'panopticon' and controlled by invisible watchmen, as Bentham and Foucault already elaborated on decennia before our time.

A mentality shift is probably on the rise. Is the Warholian value of being famous for fifteen minutes getting reversed into wanting to be anonymous for fifteen minutes? Social scientist Juan Enriquez states in a great TEDTalk that our online life is like a permanent tattoo. We are leaving trails with every mouse click or screen swipe. These trails are being gathered and used by all kinds of institutions - from government to brands - and converged into big data clusters. How will this influence our mind-set and behaviour regarding our private data? Is privacy as we know it dead? Or, as Mark Zuckerberg puts it: 'a notion of the past'?

When we take a look at the different generations we already see a divide in the definition and value of privacy. Younger generations, growing up in an online world, are much more used to sharing anything with the whole wide world. They are mainly concerned with image damage within their peer group caused by embarrassing private photos appearing online. For the older generation privacy is much more about fears of cybercrime and hacking. Privacy also seems to be culturally defined. In countries like Norway, where tax figures of citizens are made public, privacy is felt in a whole other way than in Germany, where they are very critical about making information public, also because of their WWII and DDR past.

Worldwide we see various signals popping up on how to deal with privacy issues and how to get off the grid,

for instance:

- **The emergence of security networks** like The Hague Security Delta in which businesses, governments and knowledge institutes work together to develop an innovative security network.
- **Grass roots movement** like Bits of Freedom, a Dutch civil rights movement dedicated to keep the internet accessible and open for everyone, while keeping private communication private. They have published an interesting manifest on internet freedom with 11 important topics.
- **Reports on data collection** by companies who gather huge amounts of our personal information, like Google's Transparency Report.
- **Insurances aimed at protection** against digital reputation damage like Allow (the world's first social media insurance).
- **Services that encrypt your digital messages** in military style or delete them after reading, like Snapchat, Facebook Poke, Wickr and Burn Note

What will be the future of privacy? Thinking about it triggers so many questions. How will we decide to get off the grid and to stay on it? Who will be in control of data? Can you sell your data or that of others and make a profit of it? And many, many more. 2014 might just become the year where we will take control of our data and privacy and get off the grid. ... ●