



**Australian
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Media Release

Facebook in privacy trouble – millions of Australian users affected

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A report by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has identified several areas where Facebook needs to better address privacy issues and bring its practices in line with Canadian privacy law. Dr Dan Svantesson of the Australian Privacy Foundation (APF) says, “This confirms our concerns about the privacy of Australians volunteering personal information on social networking websites. Bearing in mind the similarities between Australian and Canadian privacy law, it also suggests that Facebook may be violating Australian law. This would be a suitable occasion for the Australian Privacy Commissioner to be proactive and publish her views on the matter.”

One of the key concerns identified in the report is that Facebook has a policy of keeping personal information indefinitely, even after an account has been deactivated. “This is simply unreasonable, and may not be in line with Australia’s *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*,” according to Svantesson. “That Act makes it clear that an organisation must take reasonable steps to destroy or permanently de-identify personal information if it is no longer needed.”

Another concern relates to how Facebook shares its users’ personal information with just under one million third-party developers of Facebook applications, such as games and quizzes. “With such third-party providers being found in some 180 countries, there is a significant risk that personal information is transferred to countries lacking adequate privacy regulation,” says Svantesson. “Put simply, Australian Facebook users then lose any effective control of how their personal information is used, and the protection afforded by Australian law may be lost.”

“Further, like many other Internet companies, Facebook must improve on how it communicates with its users. The Canadian report noted that Facebook’s privacy information often was confusing or incomplete. Facebook is by no means the only Internet company that has failed to provide its users with clear and accessible information about, and appropriate tools to control, the use of their personal information. Until people have a fair opportunity to decide how their personal information is being used, they are extremely vulnerable to privacy abuse.”

The APF – Australia’s leading public interest voice in the privacy arena since 1987