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Administration releases online Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights

On Thursday, the Obama Administration released its proposal for voluntary online privacy standards, including a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights. "For businesses to succeed online, consumers must feel secure," President Obama said. Commerce Secretary John Bryson said Thursday that the Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) plans to work with industry and consumer advocates to develop codes of conduct for online companies. Once codified, businesses would be able to voluntarily commit to uphold the consensus privacy standards, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) could then enforce those commitments. In addition, President Obama hopes to work with Congress to craft legislation based on the privacy bill of rights. The Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights provides for consumers to have the right:

- to control what personal data is collected and how it is used;
- to access understandable information about privacy and security practices;
- to avoid having information used in a context unrelated to that in which it was collected;
- to have information held securely;
- to access and correct personal data in a way that is consistent with the sensitivity of the data;
- to reasonable limits to the personal data collected and retained online;
- to know who is accountable for the misuse of one's personal data.

Do Not Track

In addition to the Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights, the Digital Advertising Alliance, representing over 400 online and advertising companies responsible for the majority of online behavioral advertisements, has committed to employing a Do Not Track tool. The one-click "Do Not Track" function would allow consumers to opt out of multiple data-collection activities. While the tool would not prevent all online data tracking including "market research" and "product development," consumers could opt out of having their data used for employment, credit, healthcare, insurance, or tailored advertising purposes. Reactions to the companies' commitment has been varied, with some lawmakers praising the industry for taking initiative on privacy protections while others question whether advertisers should be setting the standards for what constitutes fair data collection. FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz said that the Do Not Track initiatives are "still a work in progress," and the FTC is committed to ensuring that any such plan offers sufficient protection for consumers.

More Information

- Read the White House fact sheet on the Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/privacy-final.pdf>
- Read the White House's full consumer data privacy framework:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/privacy-final.pdf>