Exploring Information Sharing Through California’s “Shine the Light” Law

Lauren Thomas,1
Summer Undergraduate Program in Engineering Research at Berkeley (SUPERB) 2009

Chris Hoofnagle,
School of Law
University of California, Berkeley2
Correspondence to choofnagle@law.berkeley.edu

Abstract

Consumers have a dim understanding of how companies share personal information. To “shine a light” on information sharing practices, the authors employed a unique California law to survey the information sharing practices of 112 businesses. This follow-on study to a similar, smaller survey in 2007,3 found that four years after the law took effect, compliance is uneven. Fifty-three companies did not respond to the request at all. Only six companies disclosed how they shared information with third parties for their direct marketing purposes. Thirty-nine companies informed us that they do not share information, 5 provided an opt-out option for third party sharing, and 9 responses were categorized as “other.”

1 Lauren Thomas is a senior at Louisiana State University majoring in industrial engineering. We wish to thank Shannon Canty and Quentin Mayo, fellow SUPERB students, and Ashkan Soltani, for their help in sending SB 27 letters.
2 This work was supported by the California Consumer Protection Foundation, Cassandra Malry, Executive Director and in part by TRUST (Team for Research in Ubiquitous Secure Technology), which receives support from the National Science Foundation (NSF award number CCF-0424422) and the following organizations: AFOSR (#FA9550-06-1-0244), BT, Cisco, ESCHER, HP, IBM, iCAST, Intel, Microsoft, ORNL, Pirelli, Qualcomm, Sun, Symantec, Telecom Italia, and United Technologies.