

Low Levels Of Trust In Facebook Over Privacy

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A recent UK study finds consumers have less faith in Facebook than either Microsoft or Google to keep their personal information private.

Social networking sites typically involve disclosing often very personal information to your circle of friends and to this end, it is important to have faith that the social networking brand will respect the privacy of this information.

Recent research by GfK Technology indicates, however, that Facebook has lower levels of trust in keeping personal information private than either Microsoft or Google.

Given the remarkably high levels of usage of Facebook this is clearly a concern for the brand owners.

This illustrates the dilemma facing organisations such as Facebook – whilst consumer behaviour or personal information can be key to creating new services that are enjoyed by users, there is often a sense of unease about data being used in this way.

Furthermore, as is likely the case with Facebook, the illicit activity of unscrupulous users of the service (such as those posing as friends in order to conduct fraud of some description) has a knock-on effect for the brand.

It is also very likely that changes to Facebook's privacy policy introduced last year have had an impact on consumer perceptions, with much comment that they are designed to "nudge" consumers into publicly sharing much more information.

Facebook meanwhile indicates that it is simply trying to encourage people to be more open with their updates.

Whatever the rights and wrongs in this situation, if consumers suspect that the level of privacy that they signed up for is changing, and, even worse, changing without their full awareness, they will quickly start losing faith.

Facebook has recently made a few changes to the privacy settings control panel as part of an ongoing review of its data privacy policy.

This time round, Facebook needs to effectively manage consumers' expectations and their understanding of its privacy policy for consumers to place more trust in the service.

As cloud computing solutions become much more widespread the public debate over privacy and the use of personal information will reach new heights.

There could easily be significant public backlashes against brands that are considered to be making the wrong move in this space.

For more information visit www.gfktechtalk.com

*1000 online interviews were conducted by GfK NOP among a UK representative sample of internet users. The fieldwork was conducted between 12-15 February 2010

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