

31st International Conference of
Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners
Madrid

Speaking Notes for
Jennifer Stoddart,
Privacy Commissioner of Canada

November 4, 2009 at 2:15 PM

Chair of the Second Plenary Session:

Where is the Internet headed?

How will Internet privacy end up?

The title of this session, in the international language of Latin, reminds us of the human need to communicate in a common channel, then Latin, now the Internet.

Created only 40 years ago, the Internet is a communications and information storage and processing tool that has ever-increasing popularity throughout the world. Many of our societies are now intense internet users, such that a veritable dependency on this new infrastructure exists.

As Canadian professor Marshall McLuhan said, the medium is the message. Access of governments, corporations and individuals to Internet is now reshaping how governments relate to their citizens, how corporations do their business both domestically and globally and how individuals keep in touch with their families, spend their money and talk to their friends.

At the heart of the new Internet economy is the exchange of personal information and the conditions set for its exchange. We know that the business model in the information context is more and more based on services that can be sold on-line or advertised on line and procured elsewhere.

Implicit in this advertising model is the relevance of the data about consumers (or citizens) that can be gleaned on line and refined to better target merchandise, refine design of new products or predict citizen reaction to government initiatives.

The Internet, if totally unregulated, could be the dream of both marketers and dictators (not to mention hordes of crooks).

Often Internet users are not aware of how or why their personal information is harvested from their online activities. The Internet is fun, easy to use and offers instant gratification.

It is very easy to give away personal information without making the conscious decision to do so.

And it is often directly rewarding when we do make the choice to give it away as we see in the spectacular growth of social networking.

Almost ten years ago we were told that privacy was dead and to get over it. Ironically, we have never had so many people now worried about a freedom they largely took for granted. They wonder – what does the future hold for me in terms of participating in the on-line world.

Why can I not enjoy those civil liberties I have and reap the benefits of technological innovation at the same time.

The various members of this distinguished panel will speak in turn to different aspects of the future of the Internet and its policy implications for the protection of personal information. First of all, we will hear about the technological innovations and their implications from representatives of Microsoft, Google and Facebook.

What do leaders in software development view as key issues in applying the current frameworks for data protection?

Next we will hear from the academic and advocates world. Should some features of the Internet be controlled? Are they already? Are principles in place for regulation now, such as consent, really working?

Finally, we will hear from one of the Fathers of the Internet on the tensions between anonymity, privacy and the needs of society.

In order of speaking we will begin the debate with John Vasallo, Vice President for EU Affairs and Associate General Counsel for Microsoft.

Then follows Nicole Wong, Deputy General Counsel for Google.

Elliot Schrage is Vice-president of Global Communications, Marketing and Public Policy for Facebook.

Yves Poulet is a professor of the University of Namur in Belgium and director of its computing research centre.

Marc Rotenberg is Executive Director of Washington based EPIC, the Electronic Privacy Information Centre.

Finally at 3.30 precisely using technological means Vincent Cerf , Vice-president of Google, will join the debate, drawing on his experience in shaping the Internet as we now know it.