Libraries and Privacy

LIS 550 Week 7
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Privacy and Library Ethics

- ALA Code of Ethics:
  - We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.

- Library Bill of Rights:
  - Privacy issues are implicit. ALA affirms that rights of privacy are necessary for intellectual freedom and are fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.
Washington State Law

- WAC 478-168-190 Disclosure of Library User Identity
  - Unless otherwise required by law, all library records that contain information about individual users of library services are confidential.

- Revised Code of Washington (42.17.310)
  - “The following are exempt from public inspection and copying... Any library record, the primary purpose of which is to maintain control of library materials, or to gain access to information, which discloses or could be used to disclose the identity of a borrower.”
Privacy and Libraries 1980-2010

1980
• Checkout records on paper cards – personal information was persistent but not easily found
• No computers (OK we had an Apple 2 in ILL)
• No connection to outside resources.

2010
• Checkout records online – personal information not persistent but current data available
• Online patron records
• Links to remote databases with varying privacy policies
• Some session tracking – Google Analytics
General Issues for Libraries

- Threats to privacy
  - Government/Law enforcement
  - Business accumulation of data
  - Bad actors – hackers, identity thieves

- Tension between privacy and access to data

- Data retention could enable new services

- Have privacy norms changed in the Facebook world?

- Privacy policies of vendors
Circulation

- Patron Data
- Checkout Records
- Electronic Reserves
- Interlibrary Loan
- Mail/Email
- Collections – related records
- Facility Use Data
- Alert Services
Reference

- Email
- Online Chat
- Questionpoint
RFID

- Radio Frequency Identification
- Use to circulate materials and for inventory purposes
- Can be read remotely (but not very)
- Typical data is a number assigned to an item similar to barcodes
Privacy and Web 2.0 Apps

- Web 2 apps that encourage participation and dialogue pose new privacy issues.
- Information doesn’t always stay within the original audience
- Information about others is posted.
- Information can be monitored and tracked for commercial purposes
Steps to Preserve Privacy

- Conduct a Privacy Audit
  - What data is kept? Computers, ILS, Vendors
  - Are there new services/resources to review?
- Develop Policies
- Minimize Retention of Data
- Ensure that Data is Secure
- Train staff
- Inform Library Users
UW Libraries Privacy Rules

- No information sold to 3rd parties
- Web use – no personally identifiable information except proxy server logs. Cookies used to track session characteristics
- Circulation – records maintained to manage lending – billing information retained for longer
- Email is kept for a period of time – subject to public disclosure laws
- 3rd party resource providers have their own policies