

PRIVACY AND TRUST

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Better privacy protection, including more transparency about the inevitable compromises of privacy in favour of other values, is an essential element in rebuilding trust for the Information Age.

It is in the self-interest of democratic governments and of commerce to respect the information privacy of citizens/consumers. If people lack confidence that their privacy is protected, they take steps to defend it themselves, such as by providing deliberately inaccurate data or by declining to participate in technologies or processes designed by public or private sector providers to improve efficiency and service. Both responses distort data and the decisions based on it, and both diminish the returns ordinarily expected from heavy investment in information and communications technologies. To compel information without accompanying protection, or to conceal privacy-invasive practices, erodes trust.

Data protection laws are often misrepresented as barriers, or misused to justify secrecy when privacy is not in issue. Both responses erode trust.

*Journalist, author, lawyer, **Paul Chadwick** was appointed as Victoria's first Privacy Commissioner on 30 July 2001. A journalist at the Herald and Weekly Times and the Age, Paul Chadwick has published books on FoI and on media ownership. He founded the Victorian operations of the Communications Law Centre and served on the review that revised the MEAA/Australian Journalists' Association Code of Ethics. In 1997 he received the Walkley Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism.*