

Tip of the Month February 2009

10 Simple ways to protect your Privacy

1. Read online privacy policies.

Bahamians, generally, do not like to read! You do yourself a disservice by not finding out how the organization you deal with handle your personal information. These policies set out the privacy practices and obligations of the organization or agency you are dealing with, and under which laws you are subject to.

2. Ask WHY the information is required, what they will do with it and to whom it will be disclosed.

There may be times when your information is requested but does not need to be collected. For example, very few businesses need information about your medical history. So, if you think the information being asked for by an organization or agency is not required, consider asking **why** the information has been requested. Knowing why will allow you to remain informed about how your personal information is being used, and if it is to be disclosed and to whom.

3. Only give out as much personal information as necessary.

There are many times when you may not need to provide your personal information. For example, you may not need to disclose your marital status to a retail outlet. If you don't think you need to, consider whether you should hand the information over, ask more questions about why the information is required or seek advice from our Office about what else you can do.

4. Request access to your personal information.

You have a legal right to be granted access to the personal information that organizations and agencies hold about you. There are some exceptions provided under the Data Protection Act to deny access, but you should be told what the exception is and why the organization or agency is relying on it. Knowing what personal information an organization or agency holds about you is a good way of checking that the information that they hold is accurate and up to date.

5. Make sure the information an organization or agency hold about you is accurate and up to date.

When your personal information changes, it's a good idea to inform organizations and agencies that hold your personal information of these changes particularly when you have an ongoing relationship with them.

6. Take steps to protect online privacy.

Protecting your privacy online will ensure that you are not leaving your personal information open to abuse. Good computer security includes installing reputable anti-spyware, anti-virus scanners and firewalls software and ensuring they are all up to date. Also, make sure you are visiting secure web sites when handing over

personal information including banking and credit card details. Remember that there are many email scams that are around these days.

7. Take steps to ensure your hard copy records are properly destroyed.

Don't leave your personal information lying around. Make sure you properly destroy personal information you don't want others to see when throwing it out. Invest in a good shredding machine to properly destroy expired banking and other unwanted sensitive records. This is also a good way to protect yourself against potential identity theft.

8. "Opt out" of further contact with an organization when completing forms unless you know you want to be in further contact with them.

Opting out of further contact will ensure you do not receive unwanted direct marketing, such as promotions and spam emails, from the organization or any of its subsidiaries.

9. Know your privacy rights.

The more you know about your rights, the easier, it will be for you to safeguard your privacy.

10. Exercise your privacy rights.

If you believe that your personal information has been mishandled, you should first raise the matter with the organization or agency in question and give them 30 days to adequately deal with your complaint. If you receive no response or are not satisfied with the response provided, you can then lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, which may be able to investigate the matter on your behalf.

Feel free to email us at dataprotection@bahamas.gov.bs