



New Poll: 87% of Americans do not realize their exposure to online identity threats

Most prefer greater security to innovation; public confidence severely lacking in privacy protections at major online institutions

WASHINGTON— New research released today reveals that more than 4-in-5 Americans (81 percent) are concerned about the security of their personal data online, while 54 percent consider themselves “very concerned.” Respondents lack confidence in most institutions’ ability to protect their personal data, and even among the most trusted institutions, no more than a third of Americans express a great deal of confidence that their information will stay safe.

The research, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB) in conjunction with The Chertoff Group, reveals that while many Americans have high levels of anxiety about protecting their personal data online, few realize their actual exposure. For example, 87 percent of poll respondents say they have never used cloud-based computing services, but 65 percent report using web-based email or social media services – the very cloud they believe they’ve rejected.¹

“The poll findings paint a surprising picture, with profound implications for online innovators and the broader technology community for years to come,” said Secretary Michael Chertoff of the Chertoff Group, who discussed the poll in a panel discussion with PSB President Mark Penn at the National Press Club. “It is surprising how many people live each day without appreciating the security and privacy implications of the technologies they rely upon. The more that the public understands their exposure, the more challenging it will be for companies to convince customers that their personal data is secure. Those companies that demonstrate their commitment and competence in consumer security first will have the advantage in the 21st century.”

“There’s a security challenge and a major communications challenge,” said Penn. “Technological innovation to create more secure connections is only part of the solution – Americans will need to hear clear messages about the privacy measures taken on their behalf, as well as what they can do to protect themselves. Americans are moving more and more of their lives online. As they do so, the companies that prioritize providing effective, reliable, and understandable security measures will have the chance to create powerful relationships with consumers.”

The poll also found that 58 percent of respondents would choose peace of mind over greater capabilities and efficiencies in their online lives. In fact, 85 percent of

¹ Penn, Schoen & Berland. (2009). *Online Exposure, Offline Uncertainty: Privacy and Security in America*. Washington, D.C.

respondents said that they would place a higher priority on security enhancements than on the benefits of new online computing advancements, a preference that could signal long-term consequences for companies producing cutting-edge technologies.

The findings indicate problems for institutions lacking public confidence in their ability to protect personal data online. Less than 1-in-10 respondents place trust in online email providers, private companies and online brokerages. Americans consider regional banks and healthcare providers most trustworthy, but only about 30 percent place trust in these top-ranking organizations.

The research concludes that:

1. Americans are highly concerned about the security of their personal data online
2. Anxiety over online security splits dramatically along age lines
3. Americans are unfamiliar with and concerned about many new technologies
4. Americans are willing to accept more limited capabilities in return for greater security

Methodology: PSB conducted phone interviews with 1,003 members of the general U.S. population from Aug. 6-13, 2009. The margin of error is $\pm 3.09\%$, or larger, for subgroups.

###

About Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates

Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, a unit of the WPP group (NASDAQ = WPPGY) is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. We have over 30 years of experience in leveraging unique insights about consumer opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage - what we call Winning Knowledge™. PSB executes polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and has helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. More information is available at www.psbresearch.com.

About The Chertoff Group

The Chertoff Group is a global security and risk management advisory firm that assists corporate and government clients in addressing threats related to terrorism, fraud, cyber security, border protection, and supply chain security. The firm is headed by former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and is based in Washington, D.C., with offices in New York. More information is available at www.chertoffgroup.com.