

# Australia: privacy an important factor in dealings with business

report by Eugene Oscapella

ON JULY 31ST, Australia's Federal Privacy Commissioner, Malcolm Crompton, released three pieces of research commissioned by his office on Australians and privacy. He said that the survey results show that Australians regard privacy as a closely held and highly personal value.

"Australians rank respect for personal information equal first with quality of product or service," he said.

More than 40% of respondents said they had refused to deal with organisations because of concerns over the use and protection of their personal information. "Significantly 14% of respondents said they had decided not to deal with government organisations because of privacy concerns."

Still, he noted, Australians are willing to strike a balance. "In the right circumstances, 43% of respondents said that they would be willing to provide personal details in return for more efficient and personalised services." Just over 80% agreed that it was appropriate for the government to assign unique identifiers to better track health services, but 60% quali-

fied this by saying that inclusion in a national database should be voluntary.

"Respondents look for signals that an organisation will manage their personal information well; 59% said they would trust an organisation more if that organisation gave them control over how their information was to be used; 55% said that organisations with privacy policies would be more likely to gain their trust," said Mr Crompton.

The Commissioner also claimed that Australian business was taking this message on board. Some 95% of business respondents said they considered the privacy of customers' personal information to be a very important or important issue for their organisations. Some 80% said that their business was dependent on their ability to protect and responsibly use their

customers' personal information.

The surveys did, however, identify "knowledge gaps" in the business community. For example, fewer than 40% of respondents knew which organisations were covered by the new privacy law. Commonwealth agencies, on the other hand, showed a high level of knowledge in relation to privacy issues and legislation.

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The research findings are incorporated into three separate reports available to view at [www.privacy.gov.au/research.index.html#1.1](http://www.privacy.gov.au/research.index.html#1.1).



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