Privacy Policies

A privacy policy is a legal document which deals with the rights and protection of user's information as well as the rights of the website on how to use that information. Usually a privacy policy will describe what information is collected from the user and how that information is used within the site and in some circumstances on how it is used outside of the site. A privacy policy protects both the user and the website much like a contract. The policy will say what the website will and will not do with your information. This informs the user a head of time of what is going to be done with their information and if it is not to their liking they can avoid that site. The user has the ability to choose what is done with their information by accepting the terms or not accepting and leaving the site. It also protects the site, if the privacy policy is clearly posted and worded then if a user tries to sue them they are protected. Of course the site would have to have acted within the terms of their own privacy policy.

With this in mind a privacy policy has to be constructed to give the right type of protection for the user but at the same time allow the website to use the user's information to function properly.   The privacy policy must first disclose what type of information is collected from the user and how it is used or will be used. This is one of the more important steps and must be stated clearly. Once the user does provide personal information the book Hot Text, Writing That Works, recommends that the user be rewarded. They recommend that the site should offer more benefits for the information provided. Adding a link off of every page to the privacy policy allows users to look at it at any time, this is especially important when the user is asked for information. In some instances the website host has software preinstalled to collect

information from users to help the webmaster see website bandwidth, pages visited, results of advertising campaigns, search engine performance, and other statistics needed to improve website service for the users.

The next step is to explain how their information is stored and what security measures are taken to ensure their information is safe. The policy does not need to state the exact location of servers or the exact technical security measures used to protect, but if you pay for extra security this would a good way to market that to your users. Users would also like to know about the physical safety of their data. The policy should state that the server(s) are kept in a secure location with proper security measures.   Identity theft is more and more of a threat and users want to know that the information they are giving you is safe. If user feels that they are safe and their information is safe they are usually satisfied.

Allowing the user to cancel and remove their information from your site as well as from any storage media is becoming more and more important. Many sites state that once information is collected or given to the site they own it and even if the user opts out the information is still owned by the site. At one time a large social networking company decided to change its policy and state that all information stored on their site by the user was owned by the site. In this instance the users were unhappy and demanded that the site remove that from its policy. This not only applies to removing personal information from the site but it opting out of emails from your site. The policy should cover how the information is handled on request of opting out; if it is deactivated, deleted, or stored in a separate section for opted out users. Providing the user with contact information and stating they are allowed to opt out of certain

features or prevent certain information from being used/collected/displayed will allow all ranges of users the type of security they need.

The user's right to control their information is extremely important. If they wish to remove it they should be allowed. Just as important is allowing the user to view and edit their personal information. The information is about the user and they not only want to know what type of information is collected but see their own personal information that was actually collected. Along with seeing it the policy should state they are free to change and edit their information. The policy should state what information they can edit as well. In some instances and for some applications it might not be possible for them to edit certain sections. In any case the policy needs to state what can be edited and why certain information cannot be.

As a site grows and changes it might be necessary to change the policy, to protect itself the site should word its policy to explain to its users that the privacy policy may be changed and when changes occur that all users will be notified. The policy should also explain how users will be notified, whether it be a post on the home page or a mass email to the email address provided by the user. This gives the user the assurance that your site or business operates in decent manner. Users do not want to feel like your site or business can change the policy at any time with no prior notification to them.

A very simple addition to the site would be to provide contact information for users to ask questions specifically about the privacy policy. The contact information should be located within the privacy policy and be worded so that users are encouraged to contact them if there are any questions. This section will give users the assurance that their questions are considered

important and the site or business is willing to explain themselves.   Even if the users do not have any questions the ability to ask questions shows the sites willingness to help the users.

Writing and forming a clearly worded policy will help avoid confusion and having your users ask questions on what the privacy policy means. The wording and the overall ability to understand the policy can distinguish a trusted site or business and a shady site. Many polices are written by lawyers with very confusing words and statements. This creates a conflicting separation from the user and the site. The main purpose of the policy is to build trust with the user on the use of their information. Confusing the user is not the way to build trust. All of the above mentioned components to a site need to be worded clearly and in simple enough language for the average user to easily understand.

Hoover Web Design summed up how to write a privacy policy with the following statement, "Keep it simple and don't lie to your customers." Using simple language can bridge the gap between you and your users. It can make all the difference no matter the site of your site or business. Users are not likely to trust a site with their personal information if they can't even understand how their information is being used. Once your privacy policy is made it is of the up-most importance that your site is complete compliance with it. If you state personal information will not be used in a certain way, it shouldn't be. If the policy declares certain securities measures are taken, then those measures must be taken. It is important that the site follows the privacy statement and that it does not mislead any of the users.

Works Sited

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