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Audio Essay Script

*Intro Music*

The internet is a vast and wonderful place. In some respects, it mirrors daily life; in others, it improves upon reality. However, there are some aspects of the internet that are uniquely dangerous and sinister. In real life, if someone wanted access to your personal information, they would have to physically invade your house, cellphone, or wallet. But, on the internet data is far more accessible to everyone, not just those that deserve access.

Not only is information widely accessible on the internet, the lines between online and offline data are starting to blur. Further, given that everyone is using the internet, anyone can be a victim of information theft. As Denelle Dixon states in her Ted Talk on online privacy:

“What was once an issue reserved just for famous people now becomes relevant to all of us. In a world where information is universally accessible, how do we control our online privacy? The line between our online lives and our offline lives is blurring and our privacy and our control over who we are and how we want others to see us is disappearing.”

Dixon sums this question up perfectly. In this day and age, anyone can become famous – or at least internet-famous, and I believe there is a distinction – but this is not always welcome. In fact, thanks to the prevalence of smartphones, cameras, and social media, many individuals become unwitting “celebrities” (and I say that with heavy skepticism around the term “celebrity”). Now, consider that it is easier than ever to put a name to a face, and couple that with the fact that it is similarly easy to put credit card information with a name, address, and social security number. Suddenly a person’s de-anonymization is not so exciting. It is upon all of our social institutions, as well as our individual responsibilities, to ensure that this problem is curbed.

Solving the data privacy issues associated with the internet is not an easy task. In fact, much of the danger begins with how we use and share our own personal data. In another Ted Talk, Derek Banta touches on this issue:

“Yet every day, sometimes multiple times a day, we give away all of our private information. We give away our address, our email address, our credit card information, pins. Odds are we probably share information across websites, as well. The risks are well-documented and we all know we're vulnerable, so why do we do it? Simplicity. It's just too easy. The rewards outweigh the risk. Fast and free, delivered when I want it, where I want it, risks be damned.”

That is a pretty telling excerpt, and one that I am sure most people can identify with. Case-in-point: nobody reads the Terms and Conditions. Internet data privacy is a massive issue but we are not yet taking it seriously enough. Not only do regulatory and governing bodies need to legislate with seriousness, but the average individual must treat their data with respect and seriousness, as well. Data will never truly be safe until that is the case.