GETTING PERSONAL

Smart technologies are giving companies insights into the customer's shopping carts as well as their lives. But with great knowledge comes great responsibility...

By Chetan Nayak

Last year alone, more personal data was harvested than in the previous 5,000 years of human history as per Forbes. Every time, we access the internet from our smart devices- be it through an app, a website or service—data about us is collected. Google has been collecting user data since over a decade to power its predictive search, syncing services and personalised suggestions.

Today, data is being collected on a scale larger than ever. With the help of smart technologies, enormous amounts of data about what customers see, hear, feel, and decide is being monitored, collected and analysed as companies strive to serve customers in a more relevant and personalised way. This brings data privacy into sharper focus today than ever before.

WHY?

The whole world revolves around data being continuously collected and used, whether the customer likes it or not. This makes the customer vulnerable to a large scale of problems, from hacks to cases of identity theft.

Customers may like personalised messages but there is apprehension about the extent to which companies know about them and their behaviour. There does lie a little sense of security in the fact that data collected from a customer is anonymous in an ocean full of scattered data. It remains a concern nevertheless. Even if customers trust the company to keep their data safely encrypted, the guarantee of safety from third-party attacks remains a worry. Data breaches at Facebook and Gmail are cases in point. The general thinking is: If it could happen to them, it could happen to anyone.

To allay the paranoia and insecurity, it is the responsibility of the company to make sure:

1. Customers are made aware of what is being collected and why.

Do customers actually realise what they share? Are they aware that when they check in on Facebook, they are letting Facebook know where they are and with whom? Do they realise that when they use Google glasses, Google can 'see' everything they do? Even apps that provide the identity of unknown incoming calls do so by mining your entire contact list.