

Everybody spies on everybody on the Internet. Your blogs, emails, tweets and Photos can [and will] always and everywhere be used against you ICT expert Raj Goel warns. He fights for privacy and self-determination rights of the computer user.



Raj Goel
Founder of Brainlink

Founded in 1991 Brainlink, a Consultancy for companies in the field of advantages and disadvantages of ICT.

He was also manager for the Internet Services of Market Guide, a division of The News Agency Reuters. Goel speaks regularly at cyber conferences on the dangers of social media

On New Years day a young man from Colorado wrote on Facebook: "Jesus, I was so drunk last night. Sorry to the person whose car I grazed tonight. "Five minutes later one of his Facebook Friends called the police, the same day the man was arrested for driving after a collision."

Another example. An American man who had translated a Thai book into English on Facebook, was arrested when he visited his family in Bangkok. The book was critical about the Thai king and according to Thai law prohibited. The offer of the police: if you say that you are guilty, then you only get a few years in prison, if you plead innocent then we lock you up for 20 years. The man is now sentenced for of 2.5 years cell. All his Facebook Friends who could read the translations, are guilty of "lese-majeste" according to the Thai law. They can forget a holiday in Thailand.

"Of course it's good as a drunk driver is arrested after a collision," says ICT expert Raj Goel. "But what people do not realize is that your blogs, emails, tweets and photos can be used as evidence against you. And messages that are acceptable in a western Democracy may be punishable in other countries. Internet has no boundaries."

Goel fights as a missionary for awareness and the lack of human rights in the cyber world. He speaks on international conferences, such as recently in The Hague. His children, 9 and 11 years, can only use email under his supervision and may not use social media. "As long as I don't trust them with the car keys, they are not allowed to go on the digital highway without parental supervision. If your children do have permission", he says, "make sure that they

Beware The Little Sisters

By Wil Thijssen, Photo by An-Sofie Kesteleyn

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are aware of the dangers."

Criminals

In the 'normal' world the record of a minor won't haunt him his whole life.

A 16-year-old American boy who had sex with his girlfriend, shortly before her 16th birthday, and wrote about it on Facebook, was arrested and sentenced. He is now branded as a 'pedophile' and 'sexual predator' for the rest of his life. The internet does not forget.

A woman found it out the hard way – she was seeking custody of her children. She said in court that she never used drugs. The lawyer and her ex found photos of her through social media where she smoked hash [marijuana]. She was sentenced - not because of the hash - but because of perjury. The children live with her ex-husband now.

Photo's can be used against you in various ways. What most computer users are unaware of, says Goel, is that shooting with a Smartphone which the GPS is turned on - which is almost always the case - not only reveals when and what time a picture is taken, but also where. The wife of John Sawyer, head of the British Secret Intelligence Service MI-6, three years ago had shared pictures of her family on Facebook during a holiday in Southern France. Facebook Friends could not only admire the Sawyers in their swimsuit, but through the metadata in the digital photos also their location. The result: bodyguards in the pictures had to be replaced, friends in the photographs had to be provided with British government paid security. This fiasco has cost the UK government millions of euros.

Security Strategy

The children of Michael Dell, the owner of Dell Computers, had uploaded pictures of their holiday in Fiji on their social media pages. This way the address of this wealthy family was easy to track. Their security efforts, for which Dell, Inc. paid \$ 2.7 million per year, immediately became worthless.

Another computer magnate, John McAfee, founder of the anti-virus software company, got arrested in Guatemala in early January. He was a fugitive for several months, under suspicion that he killed his neighbor in Belize. The journalist who interviewed McAfee in Guatemala, published pictures of him on his website. [The metadata in the photos was not redacted] within a day the police knocked on the door of McAfee's hiding place.

"If these computer moguls and their children are making these stupid mistakes", says Raj Goel, "how can you and I protect our children? Do they know the risks of their online behavior?" Goel cites the example of police officers in Wisconsin that are spending time on the Internet disguised as a beautiful young woman. The "beauty" is trying to be friends on Facebook with as many young people as possible. Once pictures are detected of the minors drinking alcohol (that's what I read in an article), they are fined \$227 by the police for underage drinking and may get a criminal record.

The New York City Police Department discovered in the computer of a pedophile the complete profile of a 12-year-old girl in Pennsylvania, hundreds of miles away. Through the internet, he knew her friends, classmates, hobbies, pet, cheerleading team and favorite clothing

brand. Under a false name, he had friended the girl and her school friends. "He knew more about her than her parents and teachers," says Goel. According to investigators, the man had planned to kidnap and abuse the 12-year-old. He very accurately mapped the route she traveled to and from school and all her stops along that route and at what time she made those stops. "He knew all this without ever being near her".

“The smartphone is the best spying tool ever invented”

A survey of American educational facilities by Kaplan showed that profiles on social media sometimes affect the admission of young people to schools. This includes contacts with friends and relations. Several admissions committees admitted that they sometimes have refused students on the grounds of their social media profile. The same applies to managers, they look increasingly on LinkedIn and Facebook in equal candidates for a job. "You have a clean profile," says Goel, "but if your internet friends are unsavory, they may choose some other applicant."

Goel finds it unacceptable that many rights that are guaranteed in the physical world, lack on the Internet. He wants to unleash a new struggle for human rights, but now for the cyber world.

A struggle for privacy rights, copyright and especially the self-determination of the computer user.

Why do companies collect your data? And why are they preserved for eternity?

"Collectively, all of us have built one large jail cell around the world," says Goel. "And the smartphone is the best spying tool ever invented." About thirty thousand times per month a mobile phone tells a provider where a phone is located. Because the device is usually

in the pocket or handbag's owner, the provider can determine within a meter's accuracy which routes a consumer takes. Data stored in databases remains forever.

Last year the FBI was rebuffed by a court for placing GPS trackers under vehicles of suspects which according to the judge was an unauthorized invasion of privacy. Later when the FBI submitted the GPS data of the mobile phones they had acquired from the cell phone carriers, this was accepted as admissible evidence. Why? "Because you are not the owner of the location data of your phone," says Goel. "Your cell provider is the legal owner. The investigators did not even need to show a court order to recover it. Waving a badge is enough."

Love Letters

The same applied to the discovery of the love letters from former CIA Director David Petraeus in his gmail account. "If he had received the letters from his mistress through the postal mail, FBI agents would have needed a search warrant from a judge to read them. But because they were emails, the FBI didn't need court approvals to acquire the emails", says Goel.

The discovery of those letters cost Petraeus his position as head of the most powerful intelligence agency in the world.

Investigation services on the web are increasing in power. In the Netherlands the parliament discusses about giving the police permission to hack a citizens private computer. If the police should hack on computers of citizens. In Europe the Ministers of justice investigate the possibility of how a criminals server can be infiltrated that is abroad - which usually is the case -, the internet knows no boundaries – without violating the sovereignty of a country. Goel thinks that the sovereignty of the individual citizen is already violated too much.

The American Patriot Act, that came into force after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 requires each provider to hand over all data on their customers to law enforcement, without notice to their users, when asked by the FBI. The provider cannot inform their users subsequently.

Google has announced that the search engine and Gmail provider in 2012 was forced to provide the personal information of 54 thousand users (from different countries, also from the Netherlands) to investigation services. Other social media sites, like twitter, Facebook and Linked-in, and web shops like Amazon are not publishing what information they had to release. But the total information the police have gathered, will be many, many times more than the 54 thousand of Google that they admit to releasing.

Lies

"At least as bad", Goel says, "is the fact that it is almost impossible to get providers to remove incorrect information about a user from a search engine. Even if someone lies about someone else, removal requires costly litigation or other methods, usually paid for by the victim," says Goel. "It is the same as the location data from your phone; not you, but the provider is the owner of everything that's on social media." A court in New Zealand, required Google to change incorrect information about a NZ citizen, under penalty of \$100,000. Google paid the fine.

The same is true for photos that Google was ordered by a judge to delete from the internet, and later still were popping up again. Without realizing it, internet users leave their fate in the hands of browsers and social media. Goel says "you have no power over your internet content." "New legislation is required that would decrease the power of Internet companies. The provider should not determine

what happens with digital information - users should be able to correct or delete information from these [Facebook, Google, etc] databases".

Did the digital world become a Big Brother Society?

"It's not Big Brother, but the Little Sisters that we must fear," says Goel. "If something happens anywhere, it is published immediately via Smartphone, cameras or social media and lives online forever." "We don't live in a society where one eye watches everyone, but where billions of eyes are increasingly spying on each other. This is a kind of control that even George Orwell could not imagine."

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