

# Reputations on the line: data security and trust in the telecoms and media sectors

What did 3,000 UK consumers tell us about their trust in telecoms and media companies to keep their data safe?



## We use their services several times every day – but do we trust them to keep our data secure?

Telecommunications and media companies occupy a particularly prominent position in the lives of most consumers today. They provide the platforms and services that dominate our waking hours spent outside of work, whether entertaining us at home or connecting us on the move.

The data trails that we leave behind with these companies are both relatively unique and increasingly vast. At any one time, they may cover everything from what content we consume to our geographic location. As a result, those data trails are becoming ever-more personal.

Recent events have provided consumers with plenty to consider when it comes to telco and media companies. From the revelations around PRISM and the possible privacy implications therein, through to allegations from some quarters that internet service providers are conspiring with government on a 'Snooper's Charter', the headlines of 2013 are likely to have made uneasy reading for some.

To explore whether those stories may have influenced consumer perceptions about the ability of media and telecommunications companies to keep our data safe, we asked 3,000 consumers to state their level of trust in these businesses on a scale of one to five (where five represents 'implicit trust') both today and as they felt it was in 2003.

The results, in the main, were disappointing for the sector. While telcos and media companies suffered low trust in 2003 with an average score of 3.09 (the second lowest from across our research), today that has dropped to just 2.79.

At the extreme ends of the scale, results were closely matched. Those with "implicit trust" in media and telecommunications firms fell from 9% to 5%. Those with no trust whatsoever grew from 8% in 2003 to 15% today. The growth "zero trust" has been particularly acute, growing by 5% in just the past year.

### Trading privacy for service?

If telcos and media companies are struggling to demonstrate that they are trusted by consumers to handle their personal data, how do they fare when it comes to providing a better service by using that information strategically?

Again, the sector suffers. 40% of consumers disagreed with the suggestion that their media or telecommunications providers use their information to provide a better service. In addition:

- 26% of consumers feel that their personal information is used by media businesses or telcos to extract more money from them
- 38% say they rarely or never receive targeted or personalised offers from these providers, despite them having the information to do so
- Only 5% strongly agree that their personal information is used to help make the process of interacting with these companies smoother

The fact that telecommunications and media companies have experienced an almost 10% drop in the number of people that trust them to manage their personal information seems to be indicative of a market in which those consumers have a much more pronounced awareness of some of the issues at play behind the scenes.

Of course, these businesses are not alone. The results of our study show that trust has diminished across the whole of UK industry, and the public sector too.

For telco and media companies in particular, there are almost certainly some other issues at play.

In a major study from 2012, the telecommunications sector as a whole placed third from bottom in the consumer reputation stakes. The media sector was anchored firmly in the middle of this league table.

Trust is not, and never will be, an isolated concept. Consumer trust in telcos and media companies to safeguard their data will always be linked to myriad other issues with which they associate these businesses.

Part of the problem will almost certainly be to do with fair pricing, a long-time issue for many consumers. Fear – and some degree of paranoia – may play a role in eroding consumer trust in these businesses too.

But there are more rational factors at work here too. Too few consumers seem to see their information at work in a positive way, only small numbers acknowledging that they receive a smoother or more personalised service from these companies.

While there may be trust issues to overcome, a softer and subtler route to achieving that is likely to lie in the ability of telcos and media companies to showcase that not only can they look after consumer data, but that they can use it provide a better all-round offering as well.

**David Robinson**

CSO UK&I Head of Security Bid and Pre-Sales

Key stats at a glance

More than

**A THIRD**

of consumers say they have 'little or no' faith in telco and media companies to keep their personal information secure.

The number of consumers with 'no trust' in those businesses has

**DOUBLED**

since 2003.

Less than

**5%**

feel strongly that companies in this sector use their personal information to create a better experience.

Almost

**40%**

disagree that they receive targeted offers or promotions from these companies.

More than a

**QUARTER**

feel that telcos and media companies use their personal information to get more money out of them.

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