

Very little action by companies regarding privacy

The Belgian companies often attach too little importance to the protection of personal data.

"Many employees do not know what to do with the personal data they receive", says Irina Nock Krishnan of the research company Lee & White.

She bases this on the contact she had with companies after the publication of her report on compliance with the law on protection of privacy by Belgian websites. From that report it shows that, of the 213 websites that process personal data, 206 do not comply with the law. Online forms appear to be the most commonplace method to gather personal data but often the requested information is inconsistent with the purpose.

The law does not only apply to how data is processed online, but also regulates the way in which companies handle personal data internally. As such, the data must be protected in a technical and structural way. This ranges from protecting data through encryption, so that it cannot be read even after theft, to the creation of guidelines on how to request information by phone.

From the dialogue, it demonstrates that many companies do not know what is precisely regulated in the law. Other companies attach very little attention to the subject. For the privacy statement on their website, they often limit themselves to copying an example they found elsewhere. The employees are often ignorant of what they have to do when they receive personal data. "It would be best if companies would compile a kind of manual for the personnel from an example", says Nock Krishnan.

This indicates that it is not so much a question of a technical problem, but rather a change of attitude. "As long as the customers do not exercise legal pressure, the companies will not spend any time or money on it."

Especially small companies underestimate the possible legal sanctions. These can range from a ban from processing personal data for two years to a fine of half a million euro.

It is, according to Nock Krishnan, high time that consumers are told about their right to privacy and their ability to file a complaint at amongst others the Privacy Commission. "They must realize that their data can be used in a malicious way by third parties."

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