# Data Privacy Day 2019 – What is Privacy?

January 28th is **Data Privacy Day**, an international effort to raise awareness and spread knowledge about individual information privacy. And it is an important day, because while we hear quite a lot about data breaches and privacy failures, there is still a great deal of misunderstanding around what data privacy really means. Privacy is a term with multiple definitions, which can understandably lead to some confusion. For the average individual, privacy is recognized as freedom from observation or intrusion, or simply the ability to be left alone. For the purposes of information management*, privacy concerns the collection, use, and protection of personally identifiable information (or PII).*
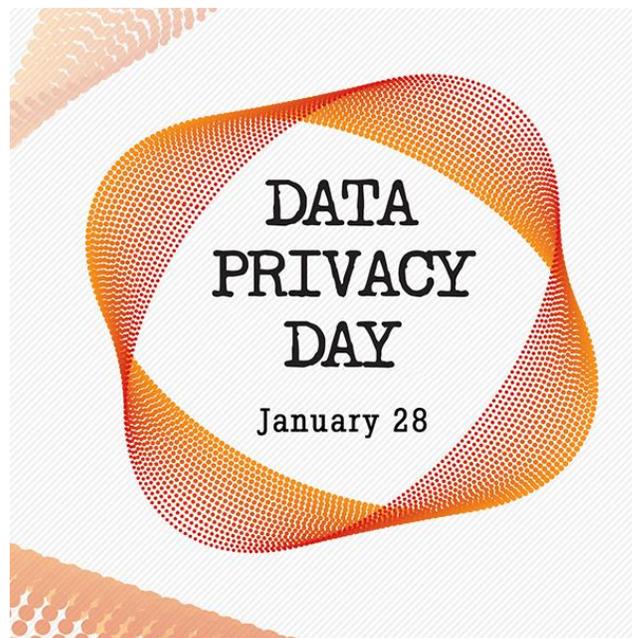
Companies, hospitals, schools, and government agencies alike hold a great deal of personal information about the people who interact with them. In many instances they need this information to perform key functions. Names, dates of birth, and social security numbers are needed to accurately identify people. Credit card numbers and banking information are needed to make online purchases, pay salaries, provide loans and credit, and collect taxes. Health records are needed to deliver proper health care, manage health insurance, and provide benefits. Using personal information effectively is often crucial to properly executing the functions that these organizations are responsible for.

However, this wealth of personal information also represents substantial risk. Improper collection, use, or protection of personal information can result in significant harm to the individual to whom that information belongs. In addition to harm to the individual, the misuse of personal information can cause a loss of confidence and trust in the companies, institutions, and government agencies themselves.
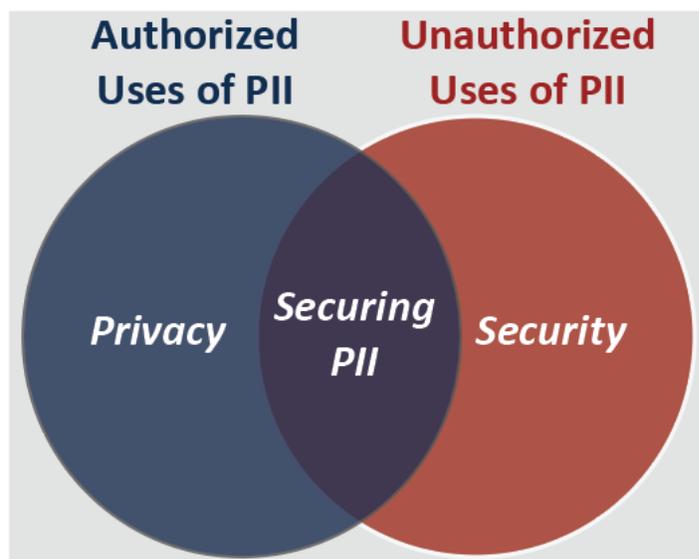
As a result, PII is both and opportunity and a threat, and privacy is the field designed to address this complicated relationship. *Privacy operations are intended to help leverage PII to most effectively provide services, prevent harm to individuals, and to guarantee the individual's rights in determining when and how their personal information is used*.

Now, If the description above sounds to you like cybersecurity, do not be alarmed. Privacy and security have a close relationship and even share some common functions and responsibilities. In general, *privacy operations are primarily focused on the risks associated with authorized uses of data, while security is primarily concerned on risks associated with unauthorized*

uses of personal information. The protection of personally identifiable information is often where these two missions intersect.

For example, the concept of properly controlling access to personal data is a key part of information management, and a primary goal of both privacy and security operations. Though complementary, the practices of these two fields to support the same goal are distinct. Information security professionals will be primarily focused with ensuring that malicious actors cannot gain access to this information using tools like encryption, firewalls, and secure network connections.

Privacy functions are more directly concerned with the authorized access and use of the personal data: determining which employees personnel require access to this information to complete their job functions; deciding when and with whom this information can be shared; ensuring access to data is only for the reasons that individuals were previously notified of; and guaranteeing that individuals themselves have access to amend or delete their information held by the organization. *The data access related risks (harm to the individual, loss of confidence in the institution), and the risk mitigation goals (limiting access to only those with the "need to know") are often the same or similar for privacy and security professionals. The strategies and operations of these two fields are what sets them apart.*

Now that we've covered the basics, be on the lookout for our continuing Data Privacy Day content from now until January 28th as we dive deeper in to the field of privacy, do some fun trivia, and offer tips, tools, and best practices for properly managing your personal data.

Happy Data Privacy Day,

PRIVACY GROUP