

Google's Street View privacy breach damages users' confidence

By [Jack Adams](#)

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While Google has escaped a fine for collecting personal data - including email addresses and passwords - being used in UK public Wi-Fi spots, the issue has been damaging to user's confidence in the brand.



Despite labelling the act as a "significant breach" of the Data Protection Act that was "not fair or lawful," the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), has simply requested that Google delete the offending data and given the search giant nine months to review its privacy practices.

The general consensus is that the ICO has been very lenient over this - Tory Member of Parliament (MP) Robert Halfon has labelled its probe "lily-livered". But has Google really escaped lightly? Whilst this won't have an impact for search engine marketing, the damage to Google's brand perception is substantial and perhaps a time for Bing to make a focussed marketing push.

Getting off lightly in monetary terms... so far

In direct monetary terms it seems certainly Google has got off lightly (in the UK at least - investigations in other nations are ongoing). However, there can't be any denying that some extent of damage has been done to users' confidence in the brand and its squeaky-clean image, built around the company's "don't be evil" motto. Indeed, as much has been admitted by Amy Whitten, Google's new director of privacy for the Engineering and Product divisions. "We're very aware that our business is based on the trust of users and if damaged [then] that's the worst thing we could do."

Media coverage compounds damage

The widespread national news coverage of the privacy breaches, especially with the matter being discussed in UK parliament, has compounded the damage. Even in general conversations, one slightly less-than-tech-savvy individual expressed reservations over Google, asking whether this breach means they should discontinue internet banking in fear of online fraud, demonstrating just how this news has pervaded the general public. The question though is whether this has put the respective individual off searching with Google? Will they now switch to a competitor - Bing, perhaps?

The damage to Google's brand perception is substantial, but the impact of this for search engine marketing is likely not - with Google near monopolising UK search (93% market share at present, according to StatCounter) and "to google" being a verb officially listed in the Oxford English Dictionary since 2006. Hence, the awareness of competitors seems too low for many of Google's users to really take action against the search giant. Despite Bing's above the line marketing push, many still aren't aware of the service.

A crafty campaign could give Bing bounce

Given this, the UK's traditional focus on Google for search engine marketing looks set to continue for the meantime. However, with this story looking likely to remain in the news for the near future - with further developments into this investigation, forthcoming worldwide sanctions against Google and MPs seeking to leverage to public's concern for political gain - an astutely timed and focused marketing push from Bing could still have an impact on the search landscape in the UK.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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