

Inside 1to1 Privacy

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Kodak Snapshot: Data Classification and Privacy

Through my involvement with the International Association of Privacy Professionals, I'd known for years that Eastman Kodak had implemented an enterprise-wide data-classification scheme – but I'd always been curious why this obscure discipline was a priority for the Rochester, N.Y.-based imaging leader.

To understand the answer, you'd probably need an update on Kodak. Most of us know it as the people who make and develop the gold boxes of photographic film, as well as the everyday cameras that George Eastman first brought to the market in 1888. In fact, Kodak does hold the #1 position worldwide in photo kiosks, with 85,000 installed, and is #3 worldwide in sales of digital-still cameras, according to assistant director of corporate media relations, Barbara Pierce.

But the \$14 billion multinational is also the world leader in online photo services, with 50 million registered users uploading their personal photos to the company's Web site. Kodak is also a leading producer of imaging equipment for hospitals, dentists, and commercial printers, making its privacy "footprint" extend into both the business-to-consumer and business-to-business arenas.

Readers who are CPOs know what this kind of complexity can mean: bureaucratic immobilization, stalled privacy agendas, and ultimately, less privacy for you and me.

Enter data classification. For those of us intrigued by the often-heated privacy debate, data classification comes across as among the most boring topics around. There's no doubt: It's a real yawner compared to RFID tags. But if your organization doesn't get data classification right, it'll be handicapped when dealing with these more complex issues. Kodak has understood that – for decades.

According to Kodak's Chief Security and Privacy Officer, Brian O'Connor, a 20-year Kodak veteran who took over as CPO in January 2005, the company has long had a culture of confidentiality around its trade secrets. Its processes for manufacturing photographic film and paper took most of the twentieth century and untold millions of dollars to perfect. Not surprisingly, Kodak emblazons its engineering drawings with classification labels, locks them in vaults, and tracks the distribution of those with the most sensitive classification.

"This made it easier to introduce classifications for personally identifiable information," O'Connor said. Indeed, around 2000, the company employed eight data classes – three for business information, and five for personal information. Each classification corresponded to detailed technical and procedural control requirements.

"Eventually, we felt that this was overly complicated," O'Connor said. So the company collapsed its classifications into four – Public, Unrestricted Internal Use, Confidential, and Confidential Controlled Distribution – and simplified its control requirements.

"We needed classifications that the outside world – particularly our vendors – could relate to," O'Connor explained.

This years-long evolution has finally positioned Kodak to mature and streamline its approaches to employee awareness, vendor assurance and privacy auditing -- O'Connor's priorities for 2007. All three processes will place a priority on information classified as Confidential Controlled Distribution, which includes consumer photo images.

What does this mean for people uploading pictures of their kids to the Kodak Gallery, and sharing them with friends? Simple – there will be less and less chance of the wrong person accessing those pictures. Maintaining this customer trust will be key to Kodak's business success in the fast-moving Digital Age, where matching information with images and other innovations are on the horizon.

In doing research for this article, I found out that one of Kodak's company values is "Respect for the Dignity of the Individual." I like that – good old meat and potatoes. Just like data classification.