

## Marc Zahn: «Is the Private Sphere Still Private?»

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Marc Zahn

**We should all embrace the safeguarding of our embattled privacy, writes Marc Zahn in an essay for *finews.ch*.**

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*This article is part of a series entitled «A Future Vision for Wealth Management». The next contribution will appear on February 5.*

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In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 12 of that concord addresses the protection of the private sphere by stipulating: «No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.»

Just one year after the Universal Declaration was ratified, **George Orwell** published his most famous work, 1984. With this satirical novel, Orwell conjured up the bleak futuristic vision of a totalitarian surveillance state. And if you think about it, the reality that surrounds us today – in blatant disregard of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights – has long caught up with or perhaps even surpassed the circumstances augured by Orwell.

### **An Aggressive Approach**

At present, hardly a day passes without the state and (its) regulatory/enforcement agencies telling us that the public interest needs to take precedence over the private sphere so that terrorism can be countered or tax equity (allegedly) can be achieved – in other words, a quasi legitimisation of today's increasingly aggressive approach to requisitioning personal information.

In a rebuttal to this reasoning, **Andreas Lusser** writes in his book *Einspruch!*: «The freedom to decide on who knows what about me is among the most elementary of my or anyone's personal prerogatives.» He points out that privacy is a precious, fundamental, hard-won human right ... and it took ages to achieve that right.

### **Closer to the Truth**

Of course it can be presumed that an upstanding citizen will have no problem if the private sphere is encroached for purposes of investigating a criminal act. What is beyond the pale, however, is the ostensibly preventive and frequently across-the-board collection/retention of personal data or, perhaps even worse, the a priori presumption of culpability on the part of taxpayers in general.

More than 200 years ago, **Benjamin Franklin**, one of America's founding fathers, is noted for saying, «Any society that would give up a little liberty in order to gain a little security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one.» Today, this statement comes closer to the truth than the rationale of many nations, i.e. that the global compulsion to collect data and information serves the freedom and safety of the citizenry.

### **Not a Great Secret**

Granted, sovereign states are not the only ones interested in peering into your private realm. Rather, snoopers of all stripes are using today's technologies to map out almost each and every aspect of our life. Take for example the Internet, a more-or-less free of charge medium that enables the practically unrestricted procurement of information.

But aye, there's the rub: one may never forget that, in reality, users pay a high price for this apparently free information, namely in the form of an incremental relinquishment of personal privacy.

Especially problematic in this regard is the fact that there is no way to control what information on you is being spread across the virtual universe. It is no great secret that details about your online shopping proclivities, the tracks left by cookies and browser profiles, as well as the detection of WLAN and IP addresses effectively

undress you in public. And that data is most certainly being used. Everything you do on the Net – be it surfing, writing or reading – gets recorded, forwarded, evaluated and ultimately exploited.

### **A Priceless Possession**

Thus it should become a general quest that personal privacy, as the hard-won, priceless possession it is, be respected and protected. But as **Arthur Schopenhauer** observed, «Mostly it is loss which teaches us about the worth of things.»

In the art of Wealth Preservation, the private sphere is the central element as well as the central concern. This, because the safeguarding of privacy is the best protection of family and fortune against arbitrary encroachment. And today, the conscious and well-considered caretaking of personal data is one of the most effective means to that end.

**Phil Zimmermann**, inventor of the e-mail encryption application «Pretty Good Privacy», contends that privacy is just as much a right as any other one, and either you use it or lose it. That being said, Benjamin Franklin comes to mind again – because he, too, invented something: the lightning rod. And in terms of the private sphere, perhaps a protective mechanism that is similarly simple yet as highly effective as a lightning rod could be designed.

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**Marc Zahn** is Director and Member of the Management Board of *Industrie- und Finanzkontor Ets.* As of 1 January 2016, he assumed the post of Chief Executive Officer of the company.

*Industrie- und Finanzkontor Ets.*, founded in 1948, is an independent, Liechtenstein-based trust company with an international orientation and a staff of roughly 50 people. The company specialises in long-term, generation-transcending wealth preservation particularly for families and entrepreneurs. The roots of *Industrie- und Finanzkontor Ets.* lie in the Princely House of Liechtenstein.

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