

Obama Facebook Application A Privacy Killer

October 25, 2010 - There is no doubt that the Democratic Party's ability to use technology and social media helped them significantly in the 2008 presidential campaign. Their effort were highly successful in mobilizing young voters; a traditionally low turn-out group. That high turnout allowed the party to capture the White House and gave them a substantial edge in many other races. So it is no wonder that the Obama administration is looking for ways to use social media applications to increase voter turnout once again. But at least one of these attempts crosses the line when it comes to personal privacy.

```
(function() {  
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];  
s.type = 'text/javascript';  
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';  
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);  
})();
```

The application called Commit to Vote is available off of Barack Obama's website and it is targeted to users of the social media website Facebook. If you sign-up to use the application, at setup you are asked to give it permission to collect certain data. This data includes your personal information including birthday and religion. While we would advise everyone to protect this type of information about themselves available from total strangers, if you want to give control of your personal information up, it is your right to do so.

But it is definitely not your right to share this type of information about your friends with other people unless you have permission to do so. But that is exactly what this application asks you to do. Anyone signing up for Commit to Vote is specifically asked to allow the application to mine data on all of their Facebook friends including their birthdays, religious and political views and where they are located. And that is where this application steps over a line.

Commit to Vote is a data mining application. It is designed to allow the Obama administration to gather information on voters, without their permission, and then use that information to mobilize Democratic-leaning voters. Perhaps there is not much new there. But what is new, is that they are asking everyone to essentially open up their address books and violate the trust of their friends and associates. In our book, that is not OK.

If you want to sign up for Commit to Vote and share your own information, that is your business. But sharing your friends' data is a complete violation of trust.

If you have friends that have signed up for this application, don't be afraid to ask them if they agreed to share your information. If the answer is yes, you may want to change the status of your online relationship. Keep in mind that once your personal information is shared, there is absolutely no way for you to know how it is going to be used.

by Jim Malmberg

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