Does Microsoft Windows 10 Compromise Your Privacy? What You Need to Know before Upgrading

August 5, 2015 â€" When Microsoft released its latest version of the Windows operating system last week, the company also revised its privacy policy. That revision is creating a storm of criticism for the company because it appears to be very weak and none-too consumer friendly. But in an age of networked devices, the revised privacy policy was probably a necessary evil. After all, if you actually want all of the computer devices you own to be networked, they have to share information with each other, and Windows 10 is built to network. So, if you are thinking about upgrading to Windows 10, here are the things you need to keep in mind before making that leap.

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s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
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If you own a computer that runs Windows, the chances are that you will want to upgrade to Windows 10. After all, it is the first Windows operating system that the company is giving away for free. On top of that, it has some pretty nice features; especially some of the networking features and the Cortana virtual assistant that allows you to talk to your computers. It also has a few features that you may want to think twice about using.

The criticism of Windows 10 privacy is centered around two things. First is the fact that each Windows 10 install generates a unique advertising ID that Microsoft uses to tailor the ads that it serves to the individual user. After all, with a free operating system, the company has to generate revenue somehow and Windows 10 uses advertising.

The second criticism is because of the following statement included in the softwareâ€™s privacy policy. "We will access, disclose and preserve personal data, including your content (such as the content of your emails, other private communications or files in private folders), when we have a good faith belief that doing so is necessary to protect our

customers or enforce the terms governing the use of the services." That's a pretty broad statement and it leaves a lot of discretion to Microsoft.

The need for such a statement is probably based on the above mentioned Cortana assistant. Cortana is a virtual assistant that operates much like Apple's Siri or Google's virtual assistant on Android. These programs store information on company servers for later use. And that information can become subject to a subpoena or a search warrant.

Fortunately, Microsoft has included the ability to change the settings for some of these features.

The easiest way to accomplish this is during the Windows install process. If you haven't already installed Windows 10, when you do, select the custom setup option. When you do this, you will be presented with a tabbed screen that allows you to control many of the options associated with the program. You can opt out of sharing information for advertising and control a wide variety of other privacy settings. Go through each of the tabs and make sure that you understand them. Taking a little time here could save you a lot of headaches later on.

One of the tabs, "Speech, inking and typing," also allows you to turn Cortana on or off. If you turn it off, you won't be a use voice recognition with your system but if you are really privacy conscious, you may want to consider this option.

With regard to Cortana, before you make your selection consider the following. If you have an iPhone or an Android device, do you use voice recognition on it? If you do, there is really no reason to disable Cortana since it functions the same way as these other systems.

Techrepublic has put together a good article on how to use the Windows 10 privacy settings. You can find it here.

ACCESS advises its readers that you may want to wait a few months before upgrading to Windows 10. As with any new operating system, it probably has a few bugs in it. Waiting to upgrade will give Microsoft some time to work those bugs out. We also know that some internet sites are saying that they are not yet compatible with Windows 10 and that they may not operate properly for users or the OS.

Businesses should also be very careful about upgrading. The privacy concerns mentioned above are really oriented to individual users. Sharing business data in any environment could be very problematic. Until it is known that Windows 10 is secure, businesses would be well advised to continue to use their older operating systems.
byJim Malmberg
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