

Privacy & mobile apps

STORY

How Privacy Impact Assessments help agencies handle personal information appropriately

Is an app on your phone collecting your personal information?

Unlike traditional programs for desktop computers, mobile apps can seek permission to access information stored on hand-held devices. This can include personal information.

When an agency that's subject to the *Information Privacy Act 2009* (the Act) is collecting personal information, it needs to be in accordance with the Act and the Privacy Principles.

The Office of the Information Commissioner looked at three agencies' use of mobile apps, and their practices in handling personal information through those apps. The three agencies undertook different approaches to considering privacy in the development and use of their app.

One agency conducted a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) at development stage. This meant appropriate security measures were built into the app to protect personal information.



Privacy & Mobile Apps Audit Report

The second agency minimised the personal information its app collected, and set up regular technical testing. The third agency considered privacy after developing the app, but committed to continue to address privacy concerns.

Agencies should always conduct a threshold privacy assessment when considering the use of any new technology. And as the objectives and purpose of a project shift, new privacy considerations may emerge. Agencies need to continuously review their PIA to ensure privacy protections are working as expected, and to address emerging risks.

Q & A with the Privacy Commissioner: What advice do you have for government agencies about mobile apps?

'First, consider the privacy implications of an app when you develop it. Reassess the privacy impact when you release new functionalities or updates for the app.'

Then, clearly explain what personal information the app collects, and how you will use the information. Describe the permissions the mobile app seeks, and why.

Cyber security is critical for privacy and personal information. Test the security of the app prior to deployment, upgrades or updates, and regularly throughout its lifecycle.

Finally, when you use contractors to develop and operate mobile apps, the contracts should bind the contractors to the privacy principles.'

To read the full report, visit

<https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/about/our-organisation/key-functions/compliance-and-audit-reports/audit-of-privacy-and-mobile-apps>



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