

GDPR ONE YEAR ON

A CATALYST FOR DATA EFFICIENCY AND IMPROVED TRUST

By Claire Philpott

The world runs on trust. Every day we place our trust in strangers to achieve our goals, be they professional or personal. At work, employers trust employees to do their best for the business. Patients trust doctors to provide the best advice and care. Drivers trust other drivers not to drive on the wrong side of the road. Individuals trust strangers with their personal details in online services and shops. Trusting strangers is difficult. In response to this difficulty, human society has evolved a formal system of trust, implemented through contracts and regulations, as these mechanisms give us the security to trust complete strangers and a means of recourse when our trust is misplaced. The objective of these mechanisms is to improve society and serve humanity.

A year ago, we lived through the implementation of one such mechanism – the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This is a regulation intended to address the complexity of laws across the EU by creating one law for all states and, as stated by the EU, to improve trust across the digital economy.

Reflecting on a year of living with GDPR, it may seem difficult to feel that trust in the digital economy has improved, with frequent news items about data breaches and misuse of personal data by large organisations such as Facebook and others.

However, these items signal a change for the better. It is no longer business as usual. Large organisations cannot do as they please with our personal information. They must ensure that they are accountable for and trustworthy with our personal data. It is this accountability, and the trust that follows from it, that will be the foundation for the digital economy to evolve to the next era, bringing forth opportunities for new businesses to thrive.

Over the next decade or so, we will see more innovative businesses develop, especially in the sharing economy. It is possible that the next generation will



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be a generation of borrowers, not owners, as the sharing economy evolves coupled with a desire to live more sustainably. We will see household items such as clothes and games shared for small fees – think of AirBnB and Uber for fashion and entertainment – all made possible through new digital platforms and facilitated by the easier sharing of personal data. Portability among providers is one of the remits of GDPR, which makes it a requirement that data should be easily shared (with data subject permission) between platforms.

Taking a shorter-term glimpse at the impacts of GDPR, businesses have been forced to take a deep look at the way in which they store and share personal data. Some may have been shocked to realise just how fragmented their data storage systems are and how many times they duplicate data entry. The work needed to comply with GDPR

will have acted as a catalyst for improving data management. Cleaning up business data, which could be perceived as a chore, rather like sorting out household cupboards – something not essential to day-to-day activities but which covertly locks resources in maintenance and overheads – will deliver dividends to even the smallest business in terms of efficiency. The process of mapping your data, to understand where you store information and how that information is shared, will lead to businesses consolidating data capture and storage, thus saving time and improving efficiency. Most businesses would not have undertaken these data cleaning activities without the incentive of GDPR and in turn, would not have benefited from improved efficiency.

So, one year on from GDPR, and with the dust of fear and confusion settled, it is interesting to note Point 4 of the regulation, which states: “*The processing of personal data should be designed to serve mankind.*”

The actions required to comply with GDPR will certainly have served businesses but it will now be interesting so see how the regulation facilitates new businesses in the digital economy and how that, in turn, improves human society.

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