

Responsible management and protection of player data

Video games could not exist without data. Not only is data largely used by game developers to make their games better for players, but the use of personal data for this goal is a core expectation of players. The video games industry treats its responsibility to protect the data of its players as among its highest priorities, including by leading the digital industry in the pseudonymisation of their players through 'gamer tags'. Future data regulation should take a clear but flexible principles-based approach that encourages good privacy practices, while avoiding overly prescriptive rules that will become out of data, stymie innovation, impose unreasonable red tape, or even have unintended negative impacts on privacy.

How does the video games industry use data?

The data generated by players has many uses, but most importantly to help ensure that games run well and players can have the best gaming experience. Developers use data to find bugs, identify areas of improvement, monitor in-game behaviour like text chat, detect cheating, and to learn how to make even better games. Likewise, games and gaming services may use limited personal information such as email addresses to strengthen account security, or ask for age-related data to help parents and carers to better monitor what their children play. Some games are also ad-supported, which typically allow players to play them for free. Like other ad-supported digital service, some of these games may use limited user data to provide customised advertising.

How do video game companies look after player data?

Game companies collect consumer data responsibly, collect only what they need, and keep personal information secure. Our industry is committed to upholding all Australian and New Zealand data management laws, providing multiple and clearly-worded privacy notices to give transparency to players, adopting best practice account security measures, and, for many platforms, offering privacy settings to give players choice around how their data is used. To better protect the privacy of their players, our industry is renowned for its widespread use of pseudonyms, 'gamer tags', avatars, and device identifiers in lieu of more sensitive personal information such as player names. This is a practice that our sector leads the digital world in.

What is IGEA's approach to privacy reform?

Industry data management practices should always meet community expectations, and we will continue to be key partners in reform discussions. We support an evidence-driven, targeted, and pragmatic approach to data regulation, and favour flexible and clear requirements that support, rather than impede, responsible data management. This will allow game companies to continue to use data in innovative ways to keep improving their products, while still upholding privacy principles. We support a sensible definition of personal information that does not cover low-risk data like pseudonyms, as well as balanced notice and consent requirements that do not simply lead to 'fine print fatigue'. Governments should also focus on multilateral efforts to promote data-sharing between trusted markets and minimise the fragmentation of global privacy regulation.

Ben Au, Director of Policy & Government Affairs, ben@igea.net