

Data leaks are the price of mega-technology

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We've been enjoying the connectivity the Internet brings for almost 40 years now. Can you believe it?

The World Wide Web was born in the 1980s, linking hypertext documents into an information system, accessible from any node on the network.

Since the mid-1990s, the Internet has been nothing short of revolutionary and has impacted almost every aspect of our society today. From instant communication by email, text messaging, Facetime, and all sorts of social networks, we are all connected like one giant brain.

I can't help but think of Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. Let's build something truly remarkable and groundbreaking and see where it takes us!

Previous 'revolutions' required labour, protests and big business. Today, it's a matter of turning on your smart phone or opening your laptop!

Jumping on the Internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant. Today, we are so interconnected and dependent on our electronic gadgets that it appears nothing is private anymore.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg apologized for a recent data leak that affected some 620,000 Canadians. The company estimates 622,161 users in Canada had their data improperly shared with Cambridge Analytica through apps used by themselves or their friends, all for political purposes.

Overall, Facebook has indicated that 87 million of its users worldwide were affected, with nearly 82 per cent of them in the United States.

Lately, such 'breaches' are not uncommon. From banks to retailers to online stores, personal information dribbles out.

What did we all expect would happen when we created such a 'monster'?

The power and reach of the Internet and the smart devices today are way beyond our control. They're almost too smart for our own good.

Yet we embrace them, coddle them and impress our friends and colleagues with the power in our own hands.

How many of us actually understand how any of it works? Can you tell me just how data is transmitted, accepted, diverted and logged? We pay a bill or order an Uber by a single push of a button. It's easy. But a gazillion calculations send millions of bits of information per second across the globe.

In this data stream is perhaps everything about us - our shopping and spending habits, our bank balances, how much we owe on our credit cards and what movies we watch. It also details our favourite take-out restaurants, clothing styles and even our shoe size.

With all this data whizzing around the planet, did it ever occur to anyone that 'glitches' are bound to occur? Don't we think that the more we use and rely on our devices to do everything for us, there's bound to be a few hurdles and 'leaks'?

My iPhone knows when I'm driving and disables alerts and notification messages while I'm behind the wheel. It shares my location with others. It tells me the weather and lets me know when my Amazon order has arrived at my doorstep. It even monitors my

health!

That's progress. And that's really cool.

We shouldn't be shocked, surprised or even upset when our personal information is shared with millions of others.

I think there's a bit of ego and self-importance at work here. I couldn't care less if the entire world knew my favourite brand of jockey shorts or what shampoo I use. It wouldn't bother me one iota if my hundreds of Facebook friends or LinkedIn contacts knew what I had for dinner last night.

It's kind of funny because some people don't mind sharing intimate details of their love life on Facebook, but don't want other people to know what toppings they like on their pizza!

I would urge people not to be naive. In 2018, if we have such 'intelligence' floating around, can you imagine what we'll see in another 10 or 20 years?

With all of this, one has to consider whether we're the leaders, or whether we're being led. It's a bit of both, I think, but ultimately the consuming public may as well have bull rings in their noses.

We will literally 'sign up' for anything that makes our lives easier. We will eagerly 'log on' and 'get' any app we may find useful.

We'll 'share' everything and each time we snap a 'selfie' we're telling the world where we are and what we're doing.

According to John Perry Barlow: 'The Internet is the most liberating tool for humanity ever invented, and also the best for surveillance. It's not one or the other. It's both.'

He's right of course.

Never before in our history has it been so easy to 'spy' on one another - our neighbours, co-workers, friends and family. We're not talking CIA or Homeland Security here, just one nifty hand-held gizmo.

Just think. Our mortgage or bank loan, containing almost every detail about us, is sent electronically over the mystical airwaves. It gets snatched and delivered. The danger is, if it's intercepted, this one document contains more personal information than we care to share.

Technology will continue to improve and the powers that be will one day seize the opportunity to spy on all of its citizens. I have no doubt our entire lives are either recorded or downloaded somewhere today.

And so I leave you with these words:

'The Internet gave us access to everything; but it also gave everything access to us.'

James Veitch