ARI KAPLAN: THE HOT LINE

P3P YIELDS ANSWERS—AND NEW QUESTIONS

I AM TIRED OF WORRYING ABOUT HOW MY PERSONAL INFORMATION will be used every time I visit a Web site. Lucky for me (and you), it appears that the World Wide Web Consortium may have found a resolution to my privacy concerns. Trouble is, the W3C’s answer raises new questions for Web site operators.

With its Platform for Privacy Preferences Project, or P3P, the consortium is beginning to enable computers to automatically read the electronically translated privacy policy of any site. P3P would scan the privacy policies posted on sites and compare the answers to privacy settings in consumers’ browsers. If the site collects data in a way consumers do not like, Internet Explorer 6.0 may block cookies based on P3P, and AT&T’s Privacy Bird browser enhancement tool will notify users.

But there are catches for Web site operators: If you do not have a P3P-coded privacy policy that a browser can read, your site’s functionality or traffic may be impaired.

Also take care in translating your privacy policy to P3P-readable form. The translation of your written guidelines could cause any number of misstatements, and a false statement in a Web site’s privacy policy could violate privacy and/or anti-fraud laws. In translating existing privacy policies, you may even confuse your customers depending on how you collect and use information. For example, you may use the facts you collect from someone merely browsing your site differently from customers who purchase goods on your site and provide their names and credit card numbers. Privacy policy statements should reflect these differences clearly.

To avoid initial problems, here are a few steps to follow:

- Coordinate your IT, legal, marketing and privacy departments. Make sure everyone knows what your privacy policy says and that they are adhering to it.
- Develop a clear understanding of how your Web site works. Confirm whether it relies on cookies or collects any private info. If it does not, you may not need to worry about this W3C proposal.
- Confirm that your third-party cookie provider—for example, your ad server—is P3P-compliant.

Ensure your policy is properly written in P3P by using the W3C’s validator program available at www.w3.org/P3P/validator/20010928.

Ari Kaplan is an attorney with McDermott, Will & Emery, in New York. He can be reached at alkaps@yahoo.com. This material is intended for reference only and should not be construed as legal advice.

Certifications that can save your job

Between the bad economy and technology’s ongoing splintering into ever-more-granular specialties, the pursuit of certifications is essential for IT professionals to keep their careers moving forward. Here are the certifications that 92 eWEEK readers recently said would do the most to help them keep their jobs and increase their salaries in the coming year:

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<th>Certification</th>
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<td>MCSE</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
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because the company pays for it, and he knows that when the good times are with us again, he’ll have credentials to bring to the salary bargaining table. “While the company’s still paying for them, get them,” LeBrun said.

Harrill is getting them despite the fact he’s paying the bill himself. Even before he finished training and testing, he got a call from Massey Electric Co., a privately owned electrical contractor in Knoxville.

Why did Massey hire him even before he’d completed his full-time training work? “The reason why we hired him while he was still in school...