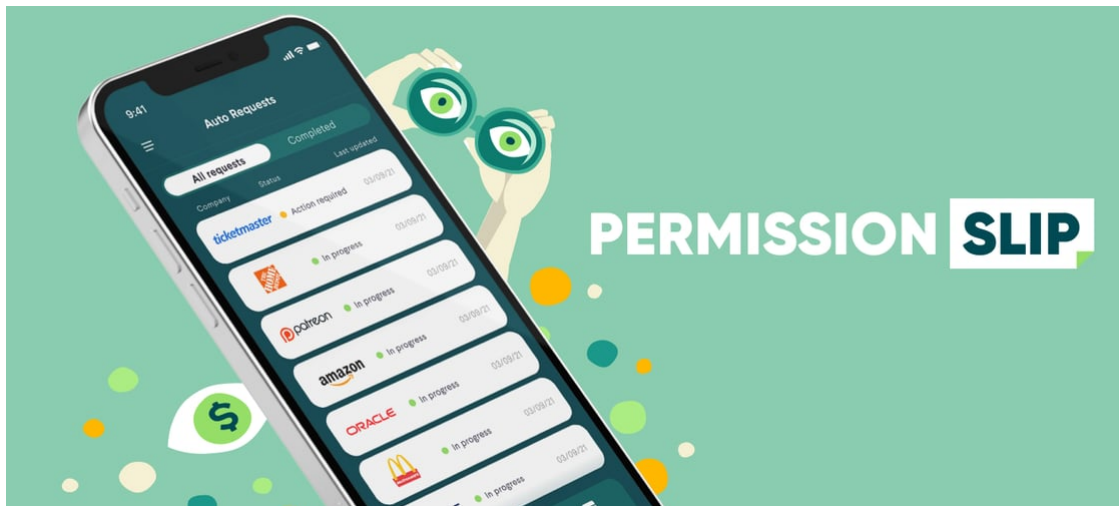


February 17, 2023

## Welcome back to our weekly newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

Unfinished supports [Project Liberty](#) in engaging diverse voices to build the critical digital infrastructure that catalyzes change.

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## The need for data rights

As we spend more time online, there's a growing sense that we need new consumer protections and new ways of guarding our data.

Many of us know by now that our searches, clicks, and swipes leave behind digital fingerprints that companies use to target us for profit (also known as the [surveillance economy](#)). Rarely, though, do we read the fine print when we click "accept" to consent to websites tracking our behavior.

[Consumer Reports' Platform Perceptions Report](#) found that 81% of Americans are either very concerned or somewhat concerned about the amount of data that platforms hold.

According to the [Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania](#), 79% of respondents said they had “little control over what marketers” could learn about them, and 73% said they did not have “the time to keep up with the ways to control the information that companies” had about them.

According to [an article in The New York Times](#) last week, the majority of Americans don’t understand how both devices and companies track user behavior online and don’t trust the way that online platforms and companies are handling their data.

Fortunately, new state policies and innovations are putting more power in the hands of consumers. This week we’re exploring the promising new laws, applications, and protocols that are fighting back against the digital surveillance of user behavior, paving a way for us to be able to better control our data and create a better internet.

## **The California law → new rights**

It’s not every day that consumers get new rights, but that’s exactly what happened in 2020, when the [California Consumer Privacy Act](#) (CCPA), which was passed in 2018 with 88% favorability, went into effect.

According to [Ginny Fahs](#), Director of Product R&D at [Consumer Reports’ Innovation Lab](#), the CCPA was a profound development because it extended new rights to consumers. There are three core rights that consumers have in the law:

1. The right to tell a company to **stop** selling their data
2. The right to tell a company to **delete** their data entirely
3. The right to get a **copy** of the data a company has about a person

The CCPA was a landmark victory for consumer protection and data privacy advocates, who had been lobbying for years for expanded consumer rights.

But “the advent of new rights could be a lot more meaningful if rights were usable,” Fahs told us, and while the CCPA expanded consumer rights, those rights were hard for consumers to use.

Fahs said that Consumer Reports enrolled over 500 Californians in a study that observed how they made use of these newfound rights under the CCPA, and they found:

- It was hard for consumers to **use their new rights**
- It was hard for consumers to tell a company to **stop selling** their data
- The companies often struggled to **process consumers’ requests**

Sending data requests to companies was a time-intensive process. Consumers looking to exercise their new rights would have to:

1. Decide which company they wanted to delete their data
2. Go to that company's website and find its privacy policy or a relevant link on their website
3. Read the privacy policy and identify the form or means by which they could surface a data request
4. Submit their data request
5. Handle any push back from the company
6. Go back and forth until the company finally complied
7. Do this for every company with whom they want to manage data, one by one.

Imagine doing all of that not just for one company, but for even 10% of the companies you interact with online. No wonder consumers don't think they have the time to properly manage their data privacy.

## **New rights → New technologies**

New laws and new rights are paving the way for new technologies.

California's enactment of the CCPA and the subsequent study into all the ways these new rights were still unusable led Consumer Reports in late 2022 to launch [Permission Slip](#), an experimental iOS app to manage the data companies have about you.

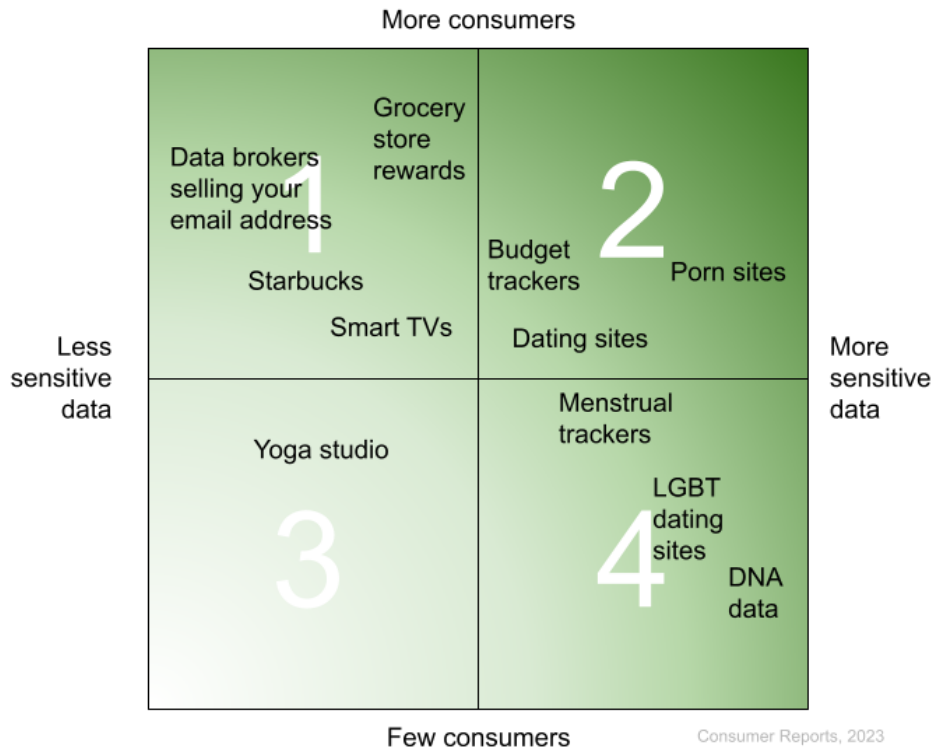
Permission Slip is a mobile app to manage your data. "It makes it easy to use the data rights you have under the law," according to Fahs, who has led the effort at Consumer Reports. Permission Slip helps consumers exercise:

1. The right to tell a company to stop selling their data
2. The right to tell a company to delete their data entirely

Once you download the Permission Slip iOS app, you can find out what data the companies you interact with most are collecting and decide which companies you want to target. Then, Permission Slip reaches out on your behalf to file a data rights request.

Because there are so many companies that collect data online, Permission Slip prioritizes by targeting companies that have data on lots of consumers (like websites with millions of accounts) and companies that handle sensitive data (like dating apps, menstrual trackers, or websites that track a user's location).

## Aim for the green zone for privacy impact



Once Permission Slip is successful in requiring a company to remove your data, you will often be notified. Check out this email we received after using Permission Slip.



Hello [REDACTED]

My name is Manny and I'm happy to help!

I've removed you from all targeted marketing, which includes marketing emails and data sharing. This takes up to 48 hours to process. You'll continue to receive confirmations and reminders when you book an OpenTable reservation.

You may still receive marketing emails from restaurants if you've chosen to share your email address with them. You can always contact the restaurant directly if you would like to unsubscribe.

If you want to delete your account altogether, please reply to this email so that we can process your request.

Let us know if we can help with anything else.

Cheers,  
Manny  
OpenTable Support

## How it works (legally)

The legal foundation for new technologies like Permission Slip is a clause buried in the CCPA that allows consumers to authorize an agent to represent their data interests. This clause enables Permission Slip to be a consumer's "authorized agent" and send requests to companies to stop selling and delete consumer data on the consumer's behalf.

Building off of the authorized agent clause in the CCPA, consumer rights experts are advocating to other states for similar clauses that would allow data rights to be more usable by permitting authorized agents to support consumers.

“One of the reasons why it’s so cool to build a product like this at Consumer Reports is that we have some of the top policy and advocacy experts on privacy in the nation on our team,” Fahs said. “We want more and more states to realize the impact that an authorized agent clause could have for not just data rights but other digital rights.”

In the last few years, other states have adopted similar privacy laws to California: [Colorado](#), [Connecticut](#), [Virginia](#), and [Utah](#), to name a few.

## **But I don’t live in California...**

Technically, only California residents are protected under California’s CCPA law. But practically—in the corporate policy realm—most companies choose to honor the California laws for consumer protection because it’s easier for them to honor the state that has the most expansive rights for consumers than it would be to differentiate consumers by 50 different laws in 50 different states.

This means that even if you don’t live in California, it’s likely that companies will comply with your data rights request.

## **Building a data rights protocol**

As we explored last week in our newsletter on online governance, there are a number of innovations happening at the protocol level (including our own [DSNP protocol](#) through [Project Liberty](#)).

Fahs told us that Consumer Reports and a number of other companies are working on a [standardized protocol for data rights](#) so that consumers, authorized agents like Permission Slip, companies who collect data, and privacy compliance businesses can define a standard way to communicate and honor laws like the CCPA.

This data rights protocol is a set of APIs that enables all these parties to talk to each other, leading to greater transparency, speed, trust, and follow-through when generating, exchanging, and processing data rights requests.

Consumers will get confirmations that their data rights requests have been honored and companies can more efficiently process those requests.


## **The future: expanded data rights**


A more ethical and humane web comes into view when new laws, new rights, and new technologies work in concert with each other. From the work Consumer Reports is doing with Permission Slip, to what [Civics Unplugged is doing to build an army of Gen Z activists](#) working to advance mental health and digital rights, to our work at Project Liberty with the [DSNP](#)


[protocol](#), there is a growing movement focused on building the future of the internet.




## Other notable headlines

 **Who would ChatGPT vote for?** Several users have alleged that OpenAI's ChatGPT exhibits a political bias in favor of the left, [according to Morning Brew](#). While OpenAI acknowledges that its chatbot has shortcomings around biases, critics are concerned that the artificial intelligence was intentionally designed to reflect the politics of the people who built the tool.

 **Chinese social media thinks the US is full of hot air.** While news publications and social media in the west were up in arms about the Chinese balloon that floated over the United States, social media in China was dominated by making light of the incident, poking fun at the US for overreacting, and sharing jokes and memes. According to [an article in Rest of the World](#), Most Chinese social media users echoed China's official position that it was a "civilian airship," used for meteorological research.

 **Is this progress in protecting user data?** Google unveiled a version of its "Privacy Sandbox" tool this week, which is intended to improve data privacy for everyday users, even while a user's data is still tracked. How? [Gizmodo reports](#) that instead of companies getting to directly access user data, Google is assigning data into various interest categories, and then selling data about those interest categories to companies. A user's data is more protected and companies can't see what you do on websites they don't control, but that user data is still being sold.

 **Studies on Algorithmic Bias at Twitter.** Before Elon Musk took over Twitter, researchers inside the company rushed to publish studies on misinformation and algorithmic bias at the social media platform. Out of concern that their new CEO might quash such transparency, and in an effort to publish findings that might contribute to a greater understanding of bias and misinformation, Twitter's AI ethics researchers published key findings before being laid off, [according to an article in WIRED](#).

## Partner News

Two events from [All Tech is Human](#):

- On February 23rd, All Tech Is Human and [Civics Unplugged](#) are collaborating on a [Youth-Led Responsible Tech Movement roundtable](#) (in-person in NYC, virtual option).
- On February 23rd, All Tech Is Human and [New Public](#) will be holding the first of its monthly livestream series, [Digital Playground](#), exploring the possibilities and limits of AI.

**New\_ Public launched [Community by Design](#)**, a new public outreach initiative with events, resources, and input from citizens. They are currently seeking [submissions](#).

**The Metagov Groundwork Fellowship:** [Metagov](#) announced a three-month online fellowship for community-embedded researchers exploring the intersections of internet infrastructure design, governance, and marginalization. [Applications are now open](#).

**[The Aspen Tech Policy Hub](#) has launched "[Train the Trainer](#)" [short courses](#)** to coach experienced policy professionals to teach its proven methods for policy impact. Selected trainers will be paid a \$2,000 honoraria per enrolled course. The top graduates from each course will also be invited to serve as future trainers in the Hub's teaching programs at a rate of \$100/hour. Learn here and apply [here](#).

## Before we close...

We're excited to announce some changes and a new direction for this newsletter, so we won't be writing a newsletter next week. You will continue to receive this newsletter on the future of digital tech and society, but on a different day (Tuesday) and from [Project Liberty](#).

## Thank you for reading.

Project Liberty, 888 Seventh Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10106

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