

Data Brokers

Facilitation Guide

Familiarize learners with the risks and issues posed by data brokers and ways to take action against data brokers.

Overview

This module introduces learners to data brokers and explores what these are and why they pose such serious risks to digital security and individual privacy. In this module, learners will gain a better understanding of what data brokers are and will explore options for dealing with data brokers, from individual, digital security actions to activist organizations pushing back against data brokers' activities.

For more information, be sure to watch Series 2 training videos from NYC Digital Safety.

Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Define data brokers
- Discuss the issues and risks associated with data brokers
- Identify different approaches for dealing with the risks posed by data brokers

Format + Time Frame

This module provides an information overview of data brokers and explores different approaches for dealing with the risks posed by data brokers.

This module will take 30 minutes. It can be extended to 50 minutes with optional discussions and activities.

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Materials

- Slide deck
- Facilitation guide
- Handout

Lesson Plan

Activity	Materials	Time Needed
Introduction and welcome Greet learners and review the plan for this module.	Slides 1 and 2	2 minutes
Defining data brokers Briefly define data brokers and pause to see if anyone has any questions.	Slide 3	3 minutes
How data brokers work and what issues they pose Review how data brokers operate, what they are, and the issues that they create and pose. Pause to see if anyone has a question or needs anything clarified.	Slides 4 through 6	5 minutes
Activity: Discuss the risks and challenges of data brokers [optional] Ask learners what other risks or issues do they think are associated with data brokers.	Slide 7	10 minutes

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Ways to deal with issues posed by data brokers Review tips and techniques for minimizing the amount of data held by data brokers.	Slides 8 through 13	15 minutes
Discussion: Digital security approaches Open a discussion with your learners about ways to use digital security approaches to avoid and deal with data brokers.	Slide 14	10 minutes
Wrap up, final tips, and final questions Review the closing thoughts and share the suggested resources. See if anyone has any final questions.	Slide 15 through 18	5 minutes

Considerations

Data brokers are a particularly complicated topic and the risks posed by data brokers are serious. There is no easy fix for dealing with data brokers, unfortunately. In many respects, data brokers are uncharted territory and are raising new questions, issues, and concerns around digital security and privacy with their practices.

For this module, you might consider spending some extra time reviewing the video and recommended resources to learn more about this complicated topic. During the module itself, leave time for questions and discussion to help learners better explore this complex topic.

While there aren't easy fixes, there are digital security best practices that can help mitigate the risk of data brokers, at least somewhat. Additionally, many organizations are doing great work to educate others and to combat data brokers. Since this module has the potential to be fairly

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negative, you might consider emphasizing the proactive things that learners can do to deal with the privacy threats raised by data brokers.

Options and Variations

This module pairs well with other modules on online advertising, including Targeted Ads, and modules on online privacy more generally. The Data Minimization module could be an interesting one to consider here, since the best practices outlined in Data Minimization are all things that can help with mitigating the risks posed by data brokers.

This module contains a good deal of content and larger ideas and issues, so if you want to pair this module you might consider running a workshop series. If you have the time and are interested in offering a longer, more immersive workshop experience, you could pair this with another module though.

This content is fairly complex but, if you are short on time, you could still share the information here at places like service points via the handout.

Assessment

The following are some suggested assessment questions that you can use and adapt for your own purposes. These questions can help you assess various things, including knowledge retention, personal views and preferences, and concept application.

You might consider asking these as a pre or post test, or you can have learners answer these as part of an exit survey or a follow-up survey. Keep reading for suggested questions and an answer key with further details and explanations.

Questions for Participants

What are data brokers?

- A. An individual or company that collects and stores personal data
- B. A type of storage for data sets

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- C. People who conduct data analysis
- D. A sort of marketing agency

What are issues associated with data brokers?

- A. Invasions of privacy
- B. Vulnerable to hacks
- C. Lack of transparency as to how they work
- D. All the above

Can you remove yourself from a data broker site?

- A. Yes, it's a simple one-time thing
- B. No, it's not possible
- C. Yes, but it takes time and effort

Answer Key

What are data brokers?

Answer: A, An individual or company that collects and stores personal data

Data brokers are individuals or organizations that collect and store data, generally for the purpose of making that information available to advertisers for targeted ads.

What are issues associated with data brokers?

Answer: D, all of the above

Data brokers are not well-regulated and come with a host of issues and concerns around individual privacy and security, as well as the overall security, or lack thereof, of the data sets the data brokers have.

Can you remove yourself from a data broker site?

Answer: C, yes but it takes time and effort

You can do this but it does take some time and effort and there's sometimes conflicting advice as to how to go about removing yourself.

Connections to Other Modules

This module connects to many other modules. The following suggestions provide opportunities for exploration, connection, and potential programming. However, feel free to explore and make connections between other modules not listed here as well!

1.1 Data Generation Online

1.2 Data Minimization

1.3 Data Breaches

1.3 Social Media Account Hacks

2.1 Cookies

2.1 Targeted Advertising

2.2 Ad Settings

These and other modules can be found at this project's website, nycdigitalsafety.org.

About This Project

These materials were released in October 2022 as part of NYC Digital Safety: Privacy & Security.

NYC Digital Safety: Privacy & Security is a partnership between New York City's three library systems — Brooklyn Public Library, The New York Public Library, and Queens Library — and METRO Library Council. With support from the New York City Office of Technology and Innovation, this project ensures that NYC residents can rely on public libraries for their questions about internet privacy and security.

Visit nycdigitalsafety.org for more information.