
Marketing Advice for the NSA

By Niraj Dawar

As the media's and the public's short attention span inevitably shifts from coverage of the NSA's activities to the next Kardashian story, you'll be turning your attention from crisis-management to the long game. You'll be re-examining your strategy, methods, and tactics for achieving total information awareness. In this, you could learn from companies in the private sector.

To: General Keith Alexander, Director of the National Security Agency, Chief of the Central Security Service and Commander of the United States Cyber Command

From: Niraj Dawar, just a regular guy and a professor of marketing at a Canadian business school

Subj: Beyond P.R. issues

Over the past decade or so, just as the NSA has built up its awe-inspiring capabilities for capturing, storing, channeling, and analyzing information, several private sector companies have built multi-billion dollar businesses doing pretty much the same thing. Sure, none of them has the reach, breadth of coverage, or the coercive power that you do, but they have something you don't: they know how to get consumer compliance.

Google, for example, knows not just what people search for, the company also know what apps are on their phone, which ones they use, and what they do with each. They know where the phone has been, and by implication, where each individual has been. Facebook has convinced one billion users around the world that their communications with their friends can and should be open to eavesdropping by Facebook, and that this information can and will be sold to advertisers. Google and Facebook know how to get consumers to sign up for surveillance.

And that is the reason there is no huge sh*tstorm surrounding Google and Facebook, no whistleblowers to worry about. Their privacy policy mostly causes concern among users only when they're accused of giving you, the NSA, backdoor access through your PRISM program.

So why is the NSA singled out for harsh treatment? The difference is that Google and Facebook provide services that customers have come to view as indispensable: email, search, maps, android operating systems, baby picture sharing, and so on. In contrast, the NSA offers only bland, unsung services such as, purportedly, protection from terrorist plots. And you've been modest about beating your drum about even those services.

Now, we do know that the NSA has very efficiently farmed out its upstream information-parsing operations to private sector companies, including Booz Allen, where Snowden spent several productive months. But the real prize, sir, lies in examining how the NSA can use its massive trove of data to develop useful services for Americans. Here are a few examples of services you could offer:

- Playback any phone call you made or received in the past five years
- Hard Drive crashed? Restore all your data from the NSA servers
- Phone stolen? Find out who stole it
- Got a new phone? Transfer all your data from the old phone to the new one with one click on the NSA site
- Automated reminders to call Grandma when you haven't called her in three weeks
- A couple of dollars off your next phone plan from Verizon (you could convince them to offer this, couldn't you?). Or better still, advice to users on which phone plan best matches their phone usage.

You could price these services so every American pays only a few dollars. You could simply add the amount to their tax bill or deduct it from their government transfers. (Perhaps you already do this?).

Of course, by offering these services you might drive a few small start-ups out of business, but that is a small price to pay. What is needed in this business is scale - total information domination. And no one can do that like the government.

Still, when you do offer these services, don't forget to get Americans to sign up for them - a click indicating they have read the guidelines, policies, and

user agreement will give you their consent to collect all the information you want, and to do whatever you want with it (rest assured, no one will actually read those policies). The next time certain senators from Oregon or Colorado ask inconvenient questions at a Senate hearing, or if they impose onerous requirements for warrants and such, you'll be covered by the End User License Agreement and Americans' voluntary participation in the NSA's exemplary privacy policy.

As for foreigners, you already know that you don't need our consent – you will continue spying on us.

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<https://knowledge.insead.edu/marketing/marketing-advice-nsa>

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