



On 1 April 2005, the Japanese Protection of Personal Information Act will come into force. Passed in May 2003, the Act obliges companies to ensure that information on

individuals is securely managed and held.

Until now, privacy issues have mainly been addressed in Japan by the so-called 'Privacy Mark' system, established by the Japan Information Processing Development Corporation (JIPDEC). Through this system, businesses may become certified as compliant with a set of personal data handling guidelines based on a Japan Industrial Standard. Yet by September 2003, only 623 companies had joined the Privacy Mark Programme.

Growing concern during the 1990s has led to the Protection of Personal Information Act, which requires stringent controls on data management. Organisations that manage personal information databases with more than 5,000 entries are now required to use secure information-management systems and to establish procedures for handling information-disclosure requests.

The introduction of the Act has led to a surge in numbers of security consulting firms. NTT Communications, for example, offers training in information security for both private and public organisations. KPMG Business Assurance, the Japanese branch of the international consultant KPMG, advises companies on how to respond to information leaks.

Changes are also taking place in the market research industry. The Act forbids both direct marketing and market research companies from using second-hand lists to contact individuals, without first having permission from those individuals to be contacted. This means that the consent of potential target

respondents now needs to be completed before the study begins, or the research agency can be liable for fines.

Thus, preferred methodologies for conducting research in Japan are slowly changing. Use of lists is becoming increasingly limited and monitor panels for recruitment are becoming more popular. In the future, it is probable that central location tests, with respondents being recruited on the street, will increase.

Companies in all industries have been affected. To comply with the Act some companies have even changed their working styles: PCs have been replaced with terminals capable only of accessing other computers. With no internal hard drives, the terminals do not allow for data to be removed – unlike PCs.



*Example of a Privacy Mark*

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