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Canadian Internet Users Concerned About Release Of Personal Information

(Toronto, December 15, 1999) — Eighty per cent of Canadians who have access to the Internet, either in their home or their workplace, are concerned about the release of their personal information to other organizations when making purchases over the Net according to a survey released today by Ernst & Young and Donahue & Partners Barristers and Solicitors (a member firm of Ernst & Young International Ltd.).

The survey was completed by the Angus Reid Group and involved interviews with 1500 Canadians, of which 57 per cent access the Internet.

In fact, 56 per cent of Canadians are either certain (20 per cent) or believe (36 per cent) that their personal information has been given to other organizations without their consent.

“Companies and organizations need to create their own policies to protect information belonging to their customers and employees in this connected economy,” says Doug McPhie, partner Ernst & Young LLP’s Information Systems Assurance and Advisory Services practice. “A customized policy that guides a company’s collection, use, retention and disclosure of personal information will help build customer trust.”

The report also indicated that Canadians, in general, share concerns about whether their personal information will be used when making purchases by way of other, more traditional, distribution channels such as phone (71 per cent) or mail (68 per cent).

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Residents of Quebec (51 per cent) were less likely to be concerned about the release of their personal information when making purchases over the Internet than their counterparts in the rest of Canada (78 to 82 per cent). It is interesting to note when studying the results that personal information protection legislation that applies to the private sector has been in place in Quebec since 1994.

A certain amount of information held by businesses is shared through connections to business partners, suppliers, customers and to the Internet. Without policies and standards to safeguard how information is managed there is the potential for privacy breaches.

“Within the next three years, no trusted company or organization will be able to conduct operations without an extensive, measurable privacy policy,” says Libby Gillman, a lawyer with Donahue & Partners.

The study results are based on the responses of 1500 adult Canadians surveyed between November 3rd and 9th 1999. This yields results in which 19 times out of 20 the data are accurate to within 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire Canadian adult population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

For a full copy of the report titled “Privacy Issues” please visit the Ernst & Young website at www.eycan.com.

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