When It Comes to Data Security, All Companies Are Tech Companies

There's a lesson — more than one, really — in the spate of recent data security breaches involving retailers.

"The lesson is this," says Nuala O'Connor, president and CEO of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a 501(c)(3) with offices in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. "A lot of companies assume that because they're not a ‘tech company,’ they don't have to worry about the security of their data. This is a dangerous assumption. Today, any company that has data is, in a sense, a tech company."

O’Connor, whose organization calls itself “a champion of global online civil liberties,” cites another reason that “the security of your data is everybody’s concern”: Sometimes people assume data security is “just a problem for the IT department,” she says; but in Target’s case, for example, “the breach was achieved through the company that takes care of the air conditioning.”

Finally, the security with which a company treats its data is a matter of reputational risk. “People think of their data as themselves,” she says. “How a company treats its data is a question of respect for its customers. So it isn’t just an engineering question or a compliance question. It involves the entire company’s reputation.”

“If you aren’t respectful of your customers’ data,” she says, “they will begin to question your other business practices. These days, everyone is a data company, and data is personal.”

For O’Connor, security has never been an abstract policy issue. The first chief privacy officer at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, O’Connor was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, before the frequent unrest persuaded her parents to move to the U.S. Here, she could enjoy a relatively peaceful childhood that prepared her for an impressive education: an undergraduate degree from Princeton, a master’s from Harvard and a law degree from Georgetown. And this academic background, in turn, prepared her for an equally impressive career in the field of law and technology.

O’Connor has worked in privacy compliance for online advertising pioneer DoubleClick; practiced law at Sidley Austin, Venable and Hudson Cook; served as chief counsel.
Academics have used various methods to prove this point. Slate reported on a study by economists Ethan Kaplan and Sharon Mukand that examined political allegiances of Californians who turned 18 just before and after the Sept. 11 attacks. As the country reeled in the aftermath of terrorism, Americans became more conservative. The researchers found that young voters who registered after the attacks were more likely to become Republicans — and stay Republicans — than those who had sent in their voter registration forms prior to 9/11.

The “nature” side of this debate, on the other hand, argues that young people are typically more liberal and older people are more conservative. Anthropologist Avi Tuschman notes in a recent Bloomberg Businessweek article that it’s universal for people in their 20s to demonstrate higher levels of “openness,” which is associated with curiosity, a preference for variety and voting for candidates on the left. On the other hand, as young people age, their sense of “conscientiousness” increases, and that trait is associated with self-discipline, dutifulness and voting for more conservative candidates. Of course, not everyone is the same. Age groups’ attitudes are still distributed across the political spectrum on a bell curve. “The entire curve, however, moves somewhat to the right during the mid-20s,” Tuschman writes.

Sometimes, national events and circumstances cause nurture to trump nature. Tuschman calls the overwhelming support for Reagan among 18-to-24-year-olds in 1984 a major exception to the rule, because young people became conservative faster than expected. In the long run, he says, a gradual shift to the right is more typical.

If our political profiles are shaped by evolution, one life event with a genetic connection does accelerate change. Parenthood, which tends to occur in one’s 30s, creates an “illusory sense of risk,” Tuschman writes. New parents become more vigilant about the world’s dangers, which translates into the belief that society needs to get tougher on crime. Since this type of thinking is associated with conservatism, parenthood helps to nudge a population rightward.

The Pew Research Center’s recent study, Millennials in Adulthood, seems to buttress the “nature” argument when it reports that 53 percent of all Baby Boomers say they have become more conservative as they have grown older, while only 35 percent say they have grown more liberal. Pew admits, however, that multiple factors can influence age differences in party affiliation.

In considering the variables, it feels a bit like we Baby Boomers are pulling and tugging at our millennial children once again, arguing over who influences them the most or whether their beliefs are preordained.

But guess what: Our youngest adult generation may confound the entire nature versus nurture debate. Here’s why:

**Millennials don’t like political parties.** Pew says half don’t identify with either major party, and only 31 percent think there is a great deal of difference between them. The good news for Democrats is that polls show millennials are still acting like 20-somethings. (Most believe in an activist government and support same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization, for instance.) They haven’t abandoned the issues they care about; they just don’t want to wear the Democratic team uniform. The bad news for Democrats is they can’t count on young people to vote regularly or to support mediocre candidates out of loyalty.

**Millennials are far less trusting than other generations.** Only 19 percent say “most people can be trusted,” according to the 2014 Pew report. If a politician or either political party does something to severely jeopardize the trust of young people, it will be extremely tough to regain their trust.

**Millennials have record-low marriage rates.** Pew reports. This means many young people will be postponing parenthood and, consequently, some of the conservative shift that Tuschman has documented. This could give Democrats a few extra years to recover from the disappointments of the Obama administration.

So while these factors will undoubtedly make it hard to predict millennials’ voting behavior in the decades to come, they don’t support the notion that young adults have already made a turn to the right.

Reach Doug at 202.787.5964 or dpinkham@pac.org.
When It Comes to Data Security, All Companies Are Tech Companies

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for technology at the Commerce Department; served as vice president of compliance and customer trust and associate general counsel for privacy and data protection at Amazon.com; and worked in consumer privacy at General Electric.

Security and Privacy Are ‘Personal’

“Besides being born in Belfast, I grew up as a New Yorker and had just moved to Washington, D.C., to start work at the Department of Commerce when, two weeks later, 9/11 occurred,” O’Connor says. “I have a brother-in-law who was in the World Trade Center but managed to survive. But I have friends from college who were either there or lost loved ones there. So security issues are not just policy questions. They’re very personal.”

She says she respects and admires just how seriously Americans take their privacy. “What was it Benjamin Franklin said — people who give up their liberty to purchase safety get less of both?” she says. “He was making an important point there, but the distinction can be misleading.”

“When I went to work for [then-Homeland Security Secretary] Tom Ridge in 2003, we saw it as part of our mission to provide security — not just national security and the physical security of our citizens, but the security of their liberties as well,” she says. “So it’s not an either/or. We were always scrutinizing our programs to make sure that individual rights were protected.”

In the corporate world, she notes, one of the most basic ways to help keep data secure is to encourage customers to select good, strong passwords. “In my experience, good privacy and good security go hand in hand,” O’Connor says. “They’re two sides of the same coin.”

But for both to be successfully protected, she says, an ongoing conversation is necessary — and inevitable. “At GE, we established what we called the Information Governance Council, which is the kind of panel that every organization should have. There, we brought all different departments and divisions of the company together, and forced a dialogue between them.”

“It’s healthy to have the privacy lawyers and the security systems technology people struggling over these issues — the lawyers, the IT people and the people directly responsible for maintaining the company’s reputation,” she says. “That’s also why you should never ‘siló’ the responsibility for data security. You need all points of view to be engaged for the conversation to be effective.”

The lifecycle of data is also a matter of concern. “There are legal reasons for keeping data,” she says. “There are also tax reasons, so companies cannot delete it except under certain circumstances. But there are ways to safeguard that data or take it offline, and organizations need to ask themselves how long they really need to keep data.”

Such conversations will be difficult, however. “It will be a struggle,” she says. “That’s not just because different parts of an organization have different responsibilities. The difficulty is also a result of the complexity of the problems, the fact that change is taking place so rapidly and that different countries and even different states have different rules and regulations about the protection of data.”

Most states have data-breach notification laws — some, like California’s, enacted as early as 2002. The California law requires a company doing business in the state and possessing the personal information of customers to disclose whenever that information has been accessed by unauthorized parties. California has also broadened its law to include medical and health insurance information.

Financial services companies have been responsible for damages resulting from breaches such as those at Target and Neiman Marcus, but a bill introduced in California in April would shift financial responsibility back to the retailers themselves. California has also tried to make it easier for individuals to delete personal information through its “eraser” law.

“That the states have been so active in this area makes compliance with this patchwork of laws an ongoing challenge,” O’Connor says.

‘More Seamless Compliance’

European countries have also been more active on the regulatory front than the U.S. federal government has been.

“This is a challenge, too, because the regulations vary from country to country, and companies want some assurance that their data is treated the same wherever it goes,” O’Connor says. “We need to work for more seamless compliance.”

This won’t be easy, but it’s not impossible. “I remember the resistance of banks and credit card companies to the idea of limiting the liability of cardholders to $50 when they were the victims of fraud,” she says. “But once the limitation was implemented, the results were good for customers and for the banks and credit card companies. Customers were confident about using their cards without undue fear of being held liable, and the markets actually expanded. The gains far exceeded the expense of making the adjustment.”

Already, an encouraging national conversation about privacy and security is taking place. In late March, O’Connor discussed the issue with Elliot Maxwell, who was on the staff of the Church Committee, a Senate select committee that in the mid-1970s investigated the activities of the U.S. intelligence agencies and how these activities affected privacy rights.

“I feel like I’m in Groundhog Day,” Maxwell said. “We’re having exactly the same conversation today that we had back then. Americans are concerned about their privacy and expressing their concerns in pretty much the same way.”

Generational Attitudes

That might give hope to Boomers who fear that tech-savvy younger Americans are insufficiently protective of their privacy.

“What I find is that the current generation isn’t less concerned with surveillance than their parents,” says O’Connor, who spoke at the Council’s Spring Executive Meeting in April in Washington. “But whenever there is a catastrophic event like 9/11, the entire country shifts its attitudes in response to a valid fear. Of course, it is a bad thing to make law in a panic, but I see no overall lack of concern for privacy among younger Americans.”

A generational difference O’Connor does detect is between what she describes as “digital natives” — younger people who have grown up using technology — and “digital immigrants,” adults who were born before the advent of personal computers, email and smartphones. Digital natives are more comfortable living their lives online, but they also have a better sense of how to protect themselves online — a more realistic understanding of what to post on Facebook, for instance.

“I worry more about the mistakes people in their 40s and 50s might make than the ones made by younger people,” she says.

But when it comes to business, what Americans of all ages must remember is that the distinction between tech companies and other enterprises has collapsed.

“As long as you have data about your customers and your employees, you have to think seriously about what kind of data you have, how sensitive it is and what protections you have in place to protect it,” O’Connor says.
You’re Not as Trustworthy as You Think

The reputations of big institutions are suffering, David DeSteno writes, partly because we don’t understand how trust really operates. In The Truth About Trust: How It Determines Success in Life, Love, Learning, and More, the professor of psychology at Northeastern University offers advice on maintaining a trustworthy reputation based on his recent studies of human behavior. And he has discovered that we’re not as ethical as we’d like to think.

Q Trust, you write, depends on reputation, whether that’s the reputation of a person or an organization.
A True, and there are two components to reputation, which we sometimes forget. The first involves integrity — whether we can count on someone to behave in a fair and ethical manner. But the second component is also important. That’s competence — whether a person or an organization can perform the task they’ve promised to perform. If they can’t, the result is the same as if they lack integrity.

Q An example?
A Think of the Affordable Care Act website. Unless you are really on the opposite side politically, you don’t assume that the problems with healthcare.gov were a question of integrity. You assume they are questions of competence, but the result is similar. Trust in the president plummeted.

Q How about the repeated reassurances that if “you like your plan, you can keep it”?
A It’s a complicated program, and I think that is how it was explained to President Obama. Of course, some people think he was lying, I don’t, but now the public — understandably — questions his competence in doing anything else he says he is going to do. The rollout of the ACA website, by the way, also presents a good example of how reputational problems develop.

Q Explain, please.
A Too often, we are accustomed to think of reputation in terms of good versus evil, but it’s more complicated. We’ve done lab studies that demonstrate that 90 percent of people will cheat on a given assignment. They will be very judgmental of other people who also cheat on the assignment. But when confronted with the fact that they’ve done the same thing that they are condemning in others, they will explain that it was OK in their case because there were special circumstances. People are very good at creating rationalizations for their behavior. People tend to think not in terms of good and evil; instead, in a crude way, we make short-term versus long-term benefit analyses and base our actions on that.

Q Can you elaborate?
A We simply calculate the trade-offs. We know there are risks, and if we can achieve short-term goals without getting caught, we do things we ordinarily wouldn’t do. I think that’s what happened with the healthcare.gov website. People were just under a great deal of pressure to meet their deadlines — to get it done — so they cut corners. You see that all the time in business. If a company faces a shortfall in the last quarter, to get the numbers up where they’re supposed to be, the big clients suddenly get better treatment than the smaller ones. There’s some risk involved, but we figure the risks are small enough that we can take them to meet the short-term goal. It’s an everyday thing in all of our lives. But it can lead to reputational problems, to a loss of trust.

Q How do you account for the lack of trust in Congress?
A I’m no historian, but trust in Congress seems to have hit an all-time low, and there are two reasons for this. First, there’s the ever-present belief that politicians are unethical. That’s nothing new. Second, though, there is what seems to be a record level of gridlock and paralysis, where we’re always on the edge of default. And that introduces the problem of competence. Together, that’s a terrible combination.

Q You quote the political scientist Larry Sabato saying today’s politicians look like “news anchors and game-show hosts.” Why is that important?
A It’s important because if we have only so much information, we trust people who “look the part.” Rick Perry looked the part, right? He had that dominant, commanding presence, so we assumed he was competent. But his performance in that one debate, at least for a time, destroyed that illusion. That wasn’t a question of ethics, but of competence.

Q How about the reputation of companies?
A That’s even more complicated, especially when so much business today is conducted online. Companies are understandably concerned with maintaining their reputations, but I’m not completely comfortable with some of the ways they’re going about this.

Q How so?
A There’s a big push these days for accountability as a way to ensure trustworthiness. But accountability is not easy to enforce; and the more procedures you put in place to enforce it, the more trade-offs there are. Individuals work best when they work in groups, and when there are a lot of mechanisms in place to ensure accountability, it can be very time-consuming. But worse than that, collegiality and collaborative work can suffer. The focus can shift from trust...
in your colleagues to compliance with the letter of the law or regulation or procedure — or whatever program is in place. Rapport is sacrificed. There may be an objectivity to the process, but it comes at the sacrifice of other important considerations.

**Q** You clearly believe there are good business reasons not only to be trustworthy but also to trust others.

**A** I’ll give you a great example — the Hancock Bank, a local bank in Gulfport, Miss. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, electricity was down, banks were closed, and even the ATMs were full of water and weren’t working. Bank executives couldn’t access their own accounts. And commerce somehow had to get moving again. So Hancock’s co-CEOs decided to do a bold thing.

They had their employees set up folding chairs and card tables around the community and instructed them to loan people $200 if only they’d write their contact information on sticky notes. People didn’t even have to prove they had Hancock accounts. It didn’t matter. The bank got more than $40 million into people’s hands that way, just trusting them to pay the money back when they could. And an amazing percentage of people did pay the money back. In the end, Hancock lost only about $200,000 doing this.

**Q** Which was?

**A** After Katrina, the bank’s financial holdings actually grew, because people now saw Hancock Bank as an institution they could trust. By exhibiting and demonstrating trust, the bank reaped long-term benefits.

Reach DeSteno at 617.373.7884 or d.desteno@neu.edu.

assistant professor of accounting at UT–Dallas who co-authored the research.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Bar Association and the American Civil Liberties Union have all expressed doubts about whether there are any monetary benefits for firms that cooperate with regulators in such investigations.

Until recently, no hard data had existed to quantify the risks and rewards of cooperating with the SEC and the DOJ in their investigations, but that’s changing.

Files, who has a Ph.D. in accounting, says “has always been interested in the consequences of fraud and how managers make decisions when faced with difficult decisions like these.”

She and her fellow researchers — Jerry Martin of American University and Stephanie Rasmussen of UT–Arlington — are determined to bring some clarity to the matter, and their ongoing research project has already produced actionable takeaways. They are looking at cases of financial misconduct to determine the relationship between cooperation by companies under investigation and the financial penalties that result.

Cooperation, as defined by the SEC and the DOJ, can include internal investigations by the companies, waiving attorney-client privilege, firing guilty parties and beefing up compliance training for all employees, among other actions.

Noncooperation does not necessarily mean that managers actively try to thwart an investigation, “although that does happen occasionally,” Files says.

“For the purposes of our research,” she says, “we simply mean that a company did not cooperate, or the level of cooperation did not meet the unknown threshold that the SEC deems worthy of crediting.

“But if you compare similar cases, you find that companies are more likely to cooperate with investigators if the misconduct is severe — if, for example, it was perpetrated over a number of years and through several managers,” Files says. “This accounts for the larger, scarier figure — the $31 million vs. $6 million.”

Of course, it would be misleading to conclude that cooperation results in across-the-board benefits to the company.

After all, conducting an internal investigation, which the SEC can regard as cooperative, is itself costly, not to mention the often hefty legal fees associated with regulatory investigations. And when a company has to issue a restatement, investor confidence is shaken and stock prices drop.

Even so, there can be significant savings — or at least a mitigation of penalties. In fact, Files says, when the cases are of comparable severity, “the average predicted fine of about $22 million would have been as high as $65 million if the company involved in the misconduct had not cooperated. That’s a 66 percent reduction in fines.”

The proper interpretation of this complex data, Files says, is that firms that cooperate with government regulators are rewarded with a significant decrease in their fines, compared with what they would have faced had they not cooperated.

“It is not my area of expertise to tell companies what they should and shouldn’t do,” Files says. “But it seems fair to say that the evidence shows that there are financial benefits to being cooperative with regulators.”
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Who’s Who … Where

- Helen Kim Fitzpatrick, formerly government relations manager, Health Care Service Corp.; now director of state government relations, Celgene
- Meagan Foster, formerly director, government affairs, NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association; now vice president, government affairs, USTelecom
- April Mobley, formerly operations manager, Texas Telcom Credit Union; now political and grassroots director, Cornerstone Credit Union League
- Meredith Nethercutt, formerly director of public affairs and grassroots advocacy, National Association of Manufacturers; now senior associate for member advocacy, Society for Human Resource Management
- Bianca Prade, formerly vice president, communications and public affairs, American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity; now vice president, public affairs and strategic communications practice, SKDKnickerbocker

Beware of ‘Shamparency’

Anyone responsible for protecting an organization’s reputation, take note: The press and maybe the public are wising up to one trick of the crisis communications trade.

There’s even a name for such a ploy. Slate’s David Weigel calls an effort of this kind “shamparency,” for “sham transparency.” The coinage is gaining traction, like Stephen Colbert’s “truthiness” or Michael Kinsley’s definition of a gaffe as when a politician inadvertently tells the truth.

Weigel introduced the term in March 2013 in exposing the allegedly “nonpartisan” nature of Organization for Action, a 501(c)(3) whose Web address was BarackObama.com. The latest example of shamparency, Weigel says, is New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie’s claim that his innocence in the Bridgegate scandal has been proven.

The proof, Christie said, is in an internal review conducted by a panel paid $1 million to investigate his involvement, or lack thereof. (Not only was the panel paid to reach such a conveniently predictable conclusion, but the Newark Star-Ledger reports that nine days before the law firm produced the report, it contributed $10,000 to a Republican political group that Christie heads.)

Weigel calls the report and the ensuing media coverage of it “classic” shamparency — “an official-looking document that reveals basically nothing yet must be discussed.”

Now freedominfo.org, inspired by the concept of shamparency, offers three other terms:

Smart transparency offers information that is presented in such a way that the public can make sense of it.

Partial transparency, where financial data is involved, “includes disclosure of only revenues rather than contracts, expenditures, sovereign funds and other valuable information.”

Zombie transparency is the worst. It is aggregated but also “opaque.”

Preston Grisham Joins Council Staff

Since graduating from the University of South Carolina in 2005, Preston Grisham has crammed in an entire career in politics, public affairs and communications. He began on the campaign of a then-state senator running for Congress in a special election. Following the victory, Preston spent eight years serving in the new member’s congressional office and managing three reelection campaigns.

After that, Preston spent three years running his own lobbying and public affairs firm, Stonewall Strategies LLC, serving a variety of clients in both South Carolina and Washington. After moving to D.C. full time, he became communications director for another member of Congress who served as a subcommittee chair on the House Armed Services Committee.

Preston joined the Council on April 1 as manager, public affairs practice, and he will work with Council members on their communications strategies in grassroots, advocacy and public affairs campaigns.

“The Council seemed like a great fit, given my background in communications and grassroots advocacy,” he says. “I look forward to working with the Council as we explore ways members can use new technology and communication techniques to make their public affairs campaigns more effective.”

Reach Preston at pgrisham@pac.org or 202.787.5968.

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• Helen Kim Fitzpatrick, formerly government relations manager, Health Care Service Corp.; now director of state government relations, Celgene
• Meagan Foster, formerly director, government affairs, NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association; now vice president, government affairs, USTelecom
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Please submit job change announcements to bsmith@pac.org. For job openings, visit pac.org/jobs.
Before you worked for Harley-Davidson, you were the SVP of government relations for the American Motorcyclist Association. Do you ride motorcycles?

I’m fortunate to have come from a family that always rode motorcycles. Everyone in my family rode motorcycles — even my mother. I have very fond memories of riding dirt bikes through the cornfields of Wisconsin when I was a kid. There’s never been a time in my adult life that I didn’t own a motorcycle. And of course, Harley-Davidson’s headquarters is in Milwaukee. I’m not sure how I was able to combine two of my passions, politics and motorcycling, into a career, but I do love the feeling of riding into our nation’s capital on my Harley. I’m very fortunate that way.

Harley-Davidson is clearly a cult brand, whose customers are very loyal and passionate about the motorcycles and the related products and what they stand for. That represents great advantages for a company but also considerable challenges, I’d imagine.

The brand certainly has its advantages. But because we are associated so closely with motorcycles and riding, people occasionally incorrectly assume the only issues we are interested in as a company are limited to things like helmet laws. And while the safety of motorcyclists remains one of our top concerns, it may not be as intuitive for them to consider that Harley-Davidson is a $6 billion, Fortune 500 company. Others may not realize the company operates in 90 countries. Consequently, we remain engaged and active in myriad issues facing companies of our size. We’re keenly interested in trade and tariff issues, laws governing vehicle financing, and harmonization and homologation of our vehicles all over the world. We run the gamut from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership to Dodd-Frank.

Who in the company is responsible for the branding — the messaging?

The group we call the “Go to Market” team. But the underlying spirit of freedom, rebellion and independence that has come to be synonymous with the brand resides in each of our employees and customers. No one owns “freedom.” Each person expresses it their own way. As we like to say, “Every customer is custom.” Consequently, all of the employees are very protective of that spirit and the brand.

They are passionate about the brand, just as your customers are?

Yes. Because our customers are so passionate, their expectations of the company and how it is represented are very high. Many feel that their identity is represented, in part, by the brand. So they have a personal stake in how we represent the product and, by extension, them.

Are there Harley enthusiasts in Congress?

Oh, yes. Sens. Angus King of Maine and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, and Congressmen Reid Ribble of Wisconsin, Scott Rigell of Virginia and Tim Walberg of Michigan, among others, all ride Harleys. On occasion, this gives us an opportunity to connect with members on an issue that they understand very well, firsthand, from their own experience. That said, we still face the same challenges as other companies and their government affairs teams getting our issues before members.

Rolling Thunder is not your conventional corporate event, is it?

True, but while Harley-Davidson is closely associated with the event, it is not our event. Rolling Thunder is a veterans’ event to remember and honor the sacrifices of America’s veterans. Harley-Davidson has a long history of supporting veterans. It remains a cause near and dear to our hearts. And we are humbled every year to look around and see so many riders honoring our veterans while riding Harleys.

A book you’d recommend?

I highly recommend Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption. It’s by Laura Hillenbrand, who also wrote Seabiscuit. Unbroken is the story of an Olympic athlete who had competed in the 1936 Berlin games shortly before joining the Army Air Forces during WWII, when his plane crashed into the Pacific Ocean. That he managed to survive the crash is amazing enough, but he went on to drift in a life raft for 46 days and over thousands of miles. He survived while losing half his body weight only to be captured by the Japanese and marched off to a prisoner of war camp, where he spent an additional two years. It’s an inspirational story of survival and the strength of the human spirit. You will not be disappointed.

Reach Ed at 202.742.4344 or edward.moreland@harley-davidson.com.
Handling any issue that has the potential to hurt your industry can be a daunting task. To help make the process less onerous, we’ve compiled some steps to get you started—covering methods for monitoring, prioritizing, managing and successfully advocating on the issues that matter most.

**What are issues, and what does it mean to manage them?**

Issues are ideas, proposals and societal discussions that have the potential to affect your organization’s license to operate. They can also be conversations with the potential to evolve in a way that undermines your organization’s objectives.

Issues can surface in the form of legislative proposals, regulatory initiatives, public rhetoric, media mentions, competitors’ messaging and activists’ priorities and communications.

You can monitor these areas by tracking legislative and regulatory proposals, monitoring traditional and social media messages, working with consultancies capable of assessing industry issues, communicating with associations and coalitions that can provide information on an issue, and creating a feedback loop with association members or corporate business units to gauge what’s happening on the ground.

Investing in an issues management system will yield efficiency and the ability to allocate resources more strategically. It will also mean you can maximize proactive public affairs work, demonstrate the value of your function by using your issues’ impact to calculate ROI, enhance public perception and engagement, and have an added opportunity for cross-functional collaboration.

**How do you choose which issues matter most?**

Since organizations can’t and shouldn’t monitor, create messaging or campaign in response to all issues, you need a formula for prioritization.

It’s important to remember that those determining the high-priority issues can’t operate in a silo. The issue prioritization process should start at the business unit or membership level and filter up to the C-suite or senior leadership level so organization-wide priorities can be set.

**Key questions to ask internally are:**

- Will this issue have an impact—and if so, how much?
- Is our organization capable of having a measurable impact on the outcome?
- Can we affect the outcome with the help of others?
- Is it primarily a political issue or a reputational issue—or both?
- How imminent is the danger posed by the issue? Do we need to act quickly?
- Will we need to redeploy resources?
- If we take on this issue, what could go right and what could go wrong?
- Is it important that we show leadership on this issue, or is there equal value in being one of many voices on our side of the issue?
- Is there a history on this issue that may offer guidance on what’s likely to happen?

Want to learn more about issues management and government relations? Join us for our July 21 Lobbying Management Workshop: Best Practices for Leading Your Team to Legislative Success or our July 22 Issues Management Workshop: A Blueprint for Success and Avoiding Risk. Join us for both programs to receive a substantial discount.

Visit [pac.org/conferences/im/issues](http://pac.org/conferences/im/issues) or contact Piper Evans at pevans@pac.org or 202.787.5978.