

Valley City Barnes County Public Library Notes

July 13, 2017 by Steve Hammel

Hello Barnes County, did you miss me? June is always a busy time at the library and last month even more so. Between summer learning, staff changes, and various projects, the newspaper column just didn't happen.

I have a question for everyone to ponder; who owns your information? I turned 50 in March and have not yet received anything from AARP. I'm not complaining but somehow I have not gotten into their database. Yet. One of the less widely talked about outgrowths of the information age is the information about you and I is worth a whole lot of money to businesses. Collecting information about customers is nothing new. In fact, here at the library we collect basic demographic information about a patron's age, whether they are a city or county resident, and numbers of items checked out every year. This helps us to see how we are doing serving our community. Business have collected similar information for many years for similar reasons, to better know their market and customers. The big change is corporations are collecting much more in-depth information about you and they are selling it. They are selling information about you and me for lots and lots of money. Consumer data profiles are a billion dollar a year industry. When you buy a new appliance and send in the warranty registration, do you also fill out the customer information questionnaire? If you do, depending on how detailed the questions are, that company now knows your age within 10 years, education level, whether you own or rent, what your yearly income is, what other appliances you own, and a whole host of other information. Have you ever bought a big ticket item and then start to get offers for home equity loans or similar? Guess what, your information was sold, analyzed, and it was determined you were a good candidate for a loan. Scary huh? That's just the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Have you heard the term, "the internet of things"? The promise is everything, all your devices, will be interconnected and controllable by your smart phone. Sounds pretty cool, very space age. Privacy experts however are very concerned particularly since consumer protection legislation has not kept up with technology. Did you know your smart phone is tracking you whether you want it to or not? From time to time my phone will ask if a location is my home, work, a favorite restaurant. How does it know? During "work" hours my phone sits in my office, at night it's in my bedroom plugged in. People usually charge their devices when they are sleeping so same location every night plugged in, must be home. Really, the software is that sophisticated. Your internet connected appliances, automobile, and smart phone are providing data for a profile that knows more about you than you know yourself. No, I'm not exaggerating. Do you know how much laundry soap do you use every year? I guarantee that information is available somewhere and when you start to run low, there's a coupon, for a different brand. If it's not happening to you now, it will soon enough particularly as you switch over to new internet connected consumer goods. How does the future look now? Next time let's talk about EULA; end user licensing agreements.

Libraries transform, but only if you use them.

Announcements:

Help us get a jump start on strategic planning by challenging the director to a game of Cribbage. Be prepared to talk about what you would like to see for the library in the next three to five years.

The library board meets the second Tuesday of every month at 5:05 pm.

Please stop in and pick up a calendar of events. We have jam packed calendar of programs for the rest of July and you don't want to miss any of them. Really you don't.

Take a look at our new improved website. www.vcbclibrary.org