

Commissioner Frank Work's Closing Remarks
PIPA 2011 – Privacy: It's Your Business
Vancouver, British Columbia October 14 2011

Since David Loukidelis and I hatched this conference 6 years ago, it is fascinating to see how it has changed, as society has changed, as technology has changed.

The first years focused on just the basics; collection, use and disclosure of personal information by organizations. Then more details: law enforcement, drug and alcohol testing. This year, I am amazed at the level of sophistication in so many areas. Several great panels on social networking, privacy breaches, outsourcing and cloud computing. I still see the other things which made this conference so great in the first place.

This was designed to be a peer to peer event. Businesses have a heavy load to bear in terms of compliance. We wanted, above all, to create a place where you could talk to each other share experiences, share frustrations and get at us regulators.

I fervently hope this conference will stay true to these roots. I ask you to help the organizers keeps this conference relevant to you. The agenda is struck by the staff of the Alberta and British Columbia offices. It is a lot of work for people already buried in caseloads. Many thanks to everyone on the advisory board for taking this on. Thanks to our organizers Verney Conference Management for accommodation, good meals, timely materials and getting the speakers here.

Finally, thanks to Commissioner Stoddart, her support and the presence of some of her people here. The basic collegiality and respect which David Loukidelis, Jennifer Stoddart, Elizabeth Denham and I have shared is so important in making this stuff work. In the process they have become dear friends.

No jurisdiction is an island. We must collaborate; we must recognize the commonalities in our objectives.

To me, the objective is to make sure the technology works for humanity; keeping in mind that above all, we must be about human dignity and the use of technology to enable a compassionate society; to give voices to the disadvantaged; to fulfill lives.

Note - I did not say create "safe and secure" societies. I worry that in our quest for safer societies, however illusory that is, we should not use the technology to punish, shame, pre-judge, resort to vigilante justice, bring back the scarlet letter or the information age equivalent of public floggings. So expect the best, and do not be disheartened when you see the worst because even idiots have voices. Resist the temptation to use information to stifle dissent, punish wrong thinking, or isolate those who hold unpopular opinions.

Build for enlightenment, freedom and empowerment, not for sanctioning, punishing or isolating. I think of the young man from the polo team who tried to torch the police car. He screwed up and he must account for that, but he does not deserve to have his life ruined. The internet never forgives or forgets. We collectively must use this resource and all the information resources of this amazing information age we live in for the advancement of humanity. That is the underlying value of these laws and this conference.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. Good luck.