

Can you keep a secret?

Kaspersky Lab Secrets Survey
April 2019



Introduction

As we all develop into walking 1s and 0s, we are becoming increasingly vulnerable. As the value of our own personal intellectual property (IP) on the dark web increases year-on-year, protecting it is becoming more and more difficult. The ramifications of not doing so are increasingly stark: financial ruin, loss of employment, reputational damage, losing friends, even the potential breakdown of a relationship.

It's not just Bruce Wayne that holds a closely-guarded secret. According to our recent survey, four-in-five of us have a secret we don't want to reveal to others. However, three quarters acknowledge that in today's connected world, keeping secrets private is more important than ever before.

Four-in-five of us have a secret we don't want to reveal to others

Many people dread a secret becoming public. 31% of UK respondents say they would feel violated if a secret was revealed to a close family member. Similarly, 31% would worry that an employer would think badly of them if a certain secret was revealed; in fact, one in five (21%) would even fear losing their job.

Today, secrets are stored across a variety of devices. Only half of 25–34-year-olds in the UK say they keep secrets in their heads. 23% of them prefer to keep those secrets on their mobile phone, 18% in their emails and 17% in the cloud.

Whilst there is an acknowledgment of the need to keep a secret across all age groups, actually doing something about it is another thing entirely. Despite the plethora of high-profile data breaches seemingly happening on a daily basis, less than a third (31%) of respondents have strengthened their passwords. Likewise, only 37% have robust and up-to-date security protection across all their devices, a figure that drops to 30% in Germany.

Methodology

The research presented in this report was conducted for Kaspersky Lab by Arlington Research using an online survey of 2,000 nationally representative adults in the UK and 2,000 nationally representative adults in Germany. Nationally representative quotas were set for gender, age and region.



Key findings

- **Four-in-five (81%) people believe that everyone has a secret they don't want to reveal to others**
- **Three quarters (75%) think that in today's connected world, keeping secrets private is more important than ever**
- **Despite numerous high-profile data breaches of world-renowned companies, less than a third (31%) of respondents have strengthened their passwords**
- **In fact, only a third (37%) have up-to-date security protection on all their devices**
- **Only half (50%) of 25–34-year-old UK respondents keep secrets in their heads. 23% keep secrets on their mobile phone, 18% in their emails and 17% in the cloud**

A plethora of secrets

We all have secrets. Whilst some can be considered bigger than others, four-in-five (81%) respondents to our survey acknowledge that everyone has a secret that they don't want to reveal to others.

The vast majority (83%) believe it is important that those secrets are kept safe. This number increases with age – perhaps indicating that the older generation has more to hide. 88% of those aged over 55 agree, compared with 76% of those aged 18 to 24.

Almost nine-in-ten (88%) of the people we asked believe it is very important for everyone to be able to maintain their privacy. Three quarters (75%) concede that in today's connected world, keeping secrets private is more important than ever before.



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It is interesting to note who people keep their secrets from. 44% admit to keeping secrets from their immediate family, with a little more (47%) admitting to keeping secrets from their circle of friends. Tiptoeing around the truth rises among the young, with 54% of 18–24-year-olds saying they keep secrets from family and 59% saying they keep secrets from friends. The amount that keeps secrets from their employer differs considerably by region. In Germany, more than a third of people (37%) have secrets they haven't told their employer, yet it is almost half that (20%) in the UK.

One-in-five (21%) UK respondents with a job keep some of their purchases secret from their partner. Hinting to the fact that money buys secrets as well as happiness, the number rises to 40% among the wealthy, with four-in-ten partners in a business admitting to keeping some purchases secret.



44% admit to keeping secrets from their family



47% admit to keeping secrets from their friends

This rises to 54% and 59% respectively among 18–24-year-olds

The ramifications

Secrets are often made to be broken. However, the ramifications of them being revealed can be stark. Almost a third (31%) of UK respondents in our survey admitted that they would feel violated if a secret about themselves was revealed to a close family member, whilst 27% would worry that their family would be upset. Interestingly, in Germany, the percentage is far less, with 23% and 18% respectively.

Similarly, a third (31%) of respondents would worry that an employer would think badly of them if a secret was revealed to them. One-in-five (21%) would even fear losing their job.

Experience certainly counts for something. The older generation appear far better at keeping a secret than their younger counterparts. Over a third (37%) of over 55s claim to have never had a secret about themselves revealed, as opposed to only 17% of 18–24-year olds.

The ultimate consequences of a secret being revealed can be bleak. 7% of respondents said that it has resulted in the breakdown of a relationship (9% in the UK). This rises to 14% among 25–34-year olds (19% in the UK). In addition, almost one-in-ten (9%) said that a secret being revealed has led to them being disowned by their family, rising to a concerning one-in-six (16%) among 25–34-year olds.



31% of UK respondents would feel violated if a secret about themselves was revealed to a close family member

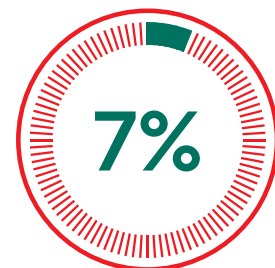


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This rises to 14% among 25–34-year olds

Is keeping a secret more difficult than ever in the digital age?

The digital transformation that has taken place globally over the past two decades has had an irreversible affect on how we all keep secrets. Three quarters (75%) believe that in today's connected world, keeping secrets private is more important than ever, if a little more difficult.

From Marriott to Yahoo, Facebook to Sony, high-profile data breaches appear to be taking place with unerring regularity. Despite the frequency of data breaches targeting a plethora of world-renowned companies, less than a third (31%) of respondents have strengthened their passwords since. This number drops to only 27% of Germans.

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Where the responsibility falls for mitigating the impact of a breach is often open to debate. 41% of UK respondents think that businesses should do more to protect their personal data from hacking. This rises to 52% among the over-55s. However, Germans don't necessarily agree, with only a third of those surveyed believing businesses should be doing more. In both regions, many instead believe that the onus should be more on governments. Yet, over a quarter think that there is currently not enough state support in regard to data security and cyber-protection. Three-in-ten (28%) want to see more regulatory or legal support. This number rises to 44% among the silent generation that were born before 1946.

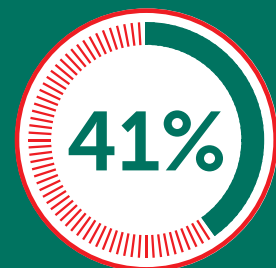
The fear of a breach is very real. In fact, over one-in-ten (12%) of respondents in the UK have been so concerned by a high-profile data breach that they have shut down one or more of their social media accounts in response. Some, however, keep hold of them for potentially nefarious purposes. 25–34-year olds in particular are the generation that are not being entirely faithful to their partners, with 15% of them admitting to having an electronic device, email account or social media profile that their partner doesn't know about (this drops to only 4% in people older than 55).



Three quarters (75%) think that in today's connected world, keeping secrets private is more important than ever



Less than a third (31%) of respondents have strengthened their passwords



41% of UK respondents think that businesses could do more to protect their personal data from hacking



Lifting a weight off their shoulders



It must be remembered that not all secrets are bad. The majority (85%) of respondents agree that keeping a birthday gift or a surprise birthday party secret can be a positive thing. This grows to 87% among women. Whilst the rise in social media has led to the art of gossiping to reach untold levels, over two thirds (70%) of respondents said that if a friend tells them something in confidence, they won't divulge it to anyone else. This rises to 72% in Germany. Similarly, a quarter (24%) say they try to keep the dream alive over the festive period by telling children that Father Christmas is real. Similarly, in a bid to avoid an argument, 17% admit to keeping who they vote for in elections a secret.

Not all secrets are kept because of positive motivations though. Perhaps worryingly, 16% of those surveyed admitted to keeping some of their purchases a secret from their partner (this rises to 18% in the UK as opposed to 14% in Germany). Four-in-five (81%) respondents believe that everyone has a secret they don't want to reveal to others.

How and where people attempt to keep their secrets varies somewhat between the regions. Only half (50%) of 25–34-year-old UK respondents keep secrets in their heads (56% Europe wide). Those younger are, though, surprisingly likely to keep secrets in their head – perhaps because of the fear of keeping them electronically – with 67% of 18–24 year-olds doing so. Less than a quarter (23%) of 25–34-year-old UK respondents keep secrets on their mobile phone, 18% in their emails and even less (17%) in the cloud. Germans eschew electronic measures even more than their European neighbours and are more likely to keep secrets locked away in cupboard, box or draw (13% versus 9% in the UK).

Only 12% of respondents said that they felt liberated when their secrets were revealed. In a view of keeping their information safe, respondents said that they take the following measures: 58% never disclose their PIN number to anyone, 50% are cautious about sharing information on social media, and 42% ensure all passwords are strong and unique. However, some are still taking a lax view of cybersecurity, with only a third (37%) saying they have up-to-date security protection on all their devices. This number drops to only 30% in Germany.

Over two thirds (70%) of respondents said that if a friend tells them something in confidence, they won't divulge it to anyone else



42% ensure all passwords are strong and unique



Only a third (37%) have up-to-date security protection on all their devices



Only half (50%) of 25–34-year-old UK respondents keep secrets in their heads



We are increasingly becoming a society that is built upon digital secrets. Whether it is a password, a forthcoming proposal, your bank account login details or a series of questionable photos taken at college, everyone has a multitude of secrets that they don't want to reveal. By ensuring you have robust (and up-to-date) cybersecurity solutions in place and following a few simple steps, you can help keep your data – and the secrets within – safe.

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