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DATA PROTECTION

As the US debates email privacy a Berlin start up surges with 'anonymous post'

No matter how much we say we're angry about the NSA scandal, we still use all the services that - in some way - are tied up in surveillance. In Europe some are trying to get us to stop.



The American tech industry is worried that the fall out from the [NSA surveillance scandal](#) could cost \$180 billion in lost business by 2016 - roughly 25 percent of the information technology services market.

Large companies are ostensibly fighting back.

Microsoft, for instance, has taken legal action to challenge US government demands for access to o of its customer's email - data, which was stored outside of the US.

The PC software maker's legal team wrote in its brief: "The government takes the extraordinary position that by merely serving such a warrant on a US-based email provider, it has the right to ob the private emails of any subscriber, no matter where in the world the data may be located, and without the knowledge or consent of the subscriber or the relevant foreign government where the c is stored."

Microsoft has also suggested that the US government may also be violating the constitution and breaching existing data sharing treaties it has made with other governments.

And the case will have global implications, since so many of us - wittingly or not - use American en and other cloud-based services.

"Secure" email

But while this legal debate plays out in the US, companies in Europe are looking for solutions to th issue of "insecure" email.

One such company is [Berlin-based Posteo](#).



Löhr says Posteo has seen a surge since the NSA scandal broke

Co-founder Patrik Löhr says Posteo offers u complete anonymity.

"You can anonymously create an email acco and pay for it anonymously," says Löhr.

Ah. There's the rub. Secure email costs. But Löhr says there's value in your money.

"Because we don't have any account data, w can't give it away, we can't lose it, no-one ca hack us, or get the data from us or urge us to give the data away."

A Posteo account costs between 12-25 euros a year.

They are ad-free and offer some degree of privacy.

The company says it deletes credit card info after you pay. And if you're really concerned about you credit privacy, you can mail Posteo cash. About 20 percent of users have opened their accounts thi way.

Löhr says Posteo's emphasis on privacy has been key its growth.

"From 2009-13, we had from zero to 10,000 customers," Löhr says. "But last year, when [Edward] Snowden released his documents [about the NSA], we went from 10,000 to 60,000 customers. So was a huge growth for us."

Ignore your concerns?

Posteo's business model is reminiscent of the early 1990s, when lots of local players offered email services - some, at cost. And they were then overtaken by "free" services, such as Yahoo and Google.

It's unclear whether Posteo will kick-start a revival of paid, local email services. But many experts feel most of us will continue to use Gmail and others like it - despite our concerns over privacy or these companies' advertising-driven thirst for our data.



Sabrina Löhr co-founded Posteo with her husband in 2009

Data protection experts in Germany, for their part, say they have been expecting a test case, such as the one launched by Microsoft in the US. American email providers want to clarify how they stand legally in the EU and the US - and how they can reconcile the various positions and requirements.

"The American government says it has the right to demand data from any American company, and subsidiaries, even if the company stores that data outside the US," says Thomas Kranig of the Bavarian data protection office. "So, for instance, Microsoft's European operations can't ignore a US government warrant. But at the same time, EU law forbids companies to give the state access to data without a clearly established legal need. And that's why I've said these companies are in a bind: are they going to break American law or EU law?"

No matter what the answer is Germany is seeing a solid trend of people switching to more privacy-conscious email providers.

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