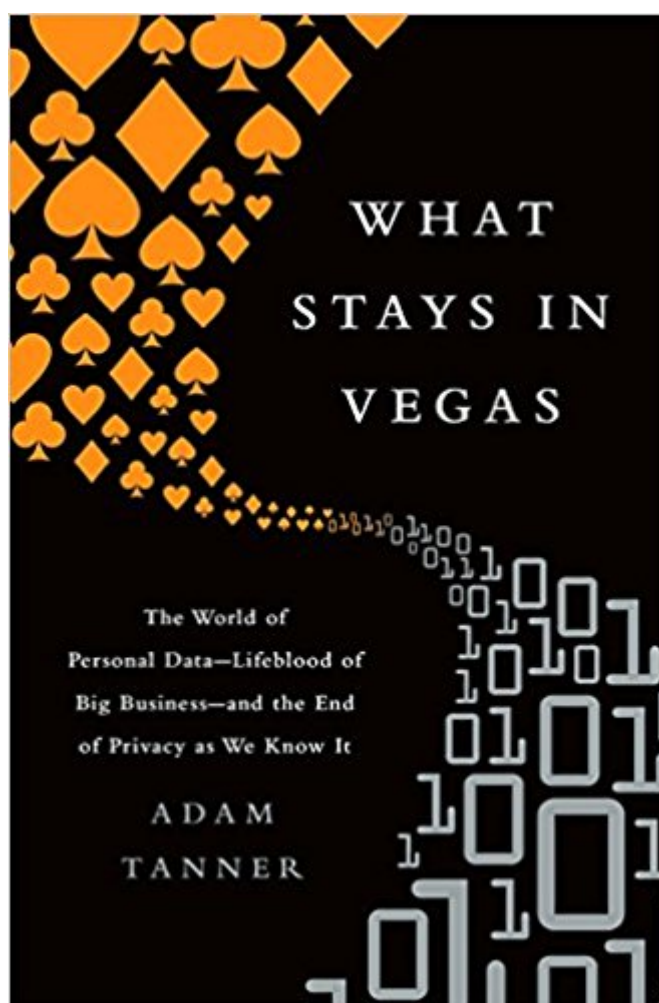


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What Stays In Vegas: The World Of Personal Data—Lifeblood Of Big Business—and The End Of Privacy As We Know It



Synopsis

The greatest threat to privacy today is not the NSA, but good-old American companies. Internet giants, leading retailers, and other firms are voraciously gathering data with little oversight from anyone. In Las Vegas, no company knows the value of data better than Caesars Entertainment. Many thousands of enthusiastic clients pour through the ever-open doors of their casinos. The secret to the company's success lies in their one unrivaled asset: they know their clients intimately by tracking the activities of the overwhelming majority of gamblers. They know exactly what games they like to play, what foods they enjoy for breakfast, when they prefer to visit, who their favorite hostess might be, and exactly how to keep them coming back for more. Caesars' dogged data-gathering methods have been so successful that they have grown to become the world's largest casino operator, and have inspired companies of all kinds to ramp up their own data mining in the hopes of boosting their targeted marketing efforts. Some do this themselves. Some rely on data brokers. Others clearly enter a moral gray zone that should make American consumers deeply uncomfortable. We live in an age when our personal information is harvested and aggregated whether we like it or not. And it is growing ever more difficult for those businesses that choose not to engage in more intrusive data gathering to compete with those that do. Tanner's timely warning resounds: Yes, there are many benefits to the free flow of all this data, but there is a dark, unregulated, and destructive netherworld as well.

Book Information

Hardcover: 336 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs; F First Edition edition (September 2, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1610394186

ISBN-13: 978-1610394185

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 34 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #889,554 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #58 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Privacy & Surveillance #469 in Books > Computers & Technology > Security & Encryption > Privacy & Online Safety #522 in Books > Computers & Technology > Databases & Big Data > Data Mining

Customer Reviews

“[A] very readable account about our disappearing privacy…What Stays in Vegas is both readable and entertaining, and in a similar manner as Michael Lewis's writings, Tanner provides interesting stories about the people and companies that are now so directly involved in our personal lives.Ã¢âÂ• Winnipeg Free Press“I would recommend the Tanner book with the excellent title of What Stays in Vegas.Ã¢âÂ• Inside Higher Ed“A compelling read on what companies are doing, how they get our information, what they do with it, and how some business approaches are more respectful of privacy than othersÃ¢âÂ• Irish Times“Tanner illustrates his arguments with a traditional, vivid example from the business and entertainment world: Caesars Palace in Las Vegas…Tanner weaves this example into a gripping account of the modern direct-marketing industry… In this fascinating look at the dazzling if suffocating domain of digital information gathering, Tanner concludes that it is returning us to a world of farms and villages, where intimate details of everyone's lives were public knowledge.Ã¢âÂ• Kirkus Reviews, *starred* review One of the Washington Post's 50 Notable Nonfiction Books of 2014“[A] masterpiece...Tanner's book is one of the best business books written this year; in fact, it is one of the best business books in this century. It reminds me of Joe Nocera's first book, A Piece of the Action, in that it combines detailed knowledge of his subject matter with an excellent writing style, countless personal interviews and observations of events.Ã¢âÂ• Don McNay, Huffington Post“What Stays in Vegas is an engrossing, story-packed takedown of the data industry…What Stays in Vegas offers a narrative that transforms Big Data from spreadsheet-dull to a racy read people will pay attention to.Ã¢âÂ• Financial Times“The book provides an insider's look at the business of assembling, packaging and reselling data, and it uses glittery Las Vegas to show that kind of information at work.Ã¢âÂ• Dina Temple-Raston, Washington Post“Mr. Tanner's engaging book is realistic.Ã¢âÂ• Marc Levinson, Wall Street Journal"Although ‘What Stays in Vegas' starts with insights gained from casino data, the book is even more interesting when it delves into the occasionally questionable practices of other businesses that use personal data for profit.Ã¢âÂ• Kim Ukura, Madison (WI) Capital Times“Although What Stays in Vegas starts with insights gained from casino data, the book is even more interesting when it delves into the occasionally questionable practices of other businesses that use personal data for profit.Ã¢âÂ• Capital Times, (Madison (WI))“Data may be to the 21st century economy what oil was to the 20th, a hugely valuable asset essential to economic life and often a source of conflict. This entertaining yet deeply informative book is a great guide to what has, or hasn't, happened and to what lies ahead.Ã¢âÂ• Lawrence Summers, former Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, &

President Emeritus and Charles W. Eliot University Professor of Harvard University

Adam Tanner writes about the business of personal data. He is a fellow at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University and was previously a Nieman fellow there. Tanner has worked for Reuters News Agency as Balkans bureau chief (based in Belgrade, Serbia), as well as San Francisco bureau chief, and has had previous postings in Berlin, Moscow, and Washington, DC. He also contributes to Forbes and other magazines.

Thought I would find the use of personal data compiled by Caesar's Palace as a means to improve the client experience and retention interesting and did. Not quite the "insight" I was looking for in terms of gaming the system to increase the freebies (Not hard - bet more, lose more!). The book veered from the Vegas emphasis into the role of data brokers in today's economy and the issue of privacy and ethics as it relates to data disclosure and use. Interesting book, but a bit on the basic side; a bit more specificity would have been helpful.

"What Stays in Vegas" is a good read about the collection and use of personal data. The main thread of Adam Tanner's book is the well-known tale of Gary Loveman's unlikely ascendancy to the top of the pile at what was then Harrah's (now Caesars). Tanner got access to Loveman and his top ring of executives and makes good use of it. He details in clear, rich detail how Caesars compiles information on its customers, how it crafts offers and how uses that data/offer mix to attempt to optimize profit. As Taner notes, "The best businesses give consumers a choice whether or not to share their data, and offer benefits in return. The trick for executives is to strike the right balance when offering incentives." Should we be put off by the fact that Caesars ultimately filed for bankruptcy? I say "no." That outcome was more a reflection of peak-LBO overreach by owners Apollo and TPG rather than any failings by the Loveman team. The level of debt service required post buyout just never made a lot of sense. And, any proposed trajectory to profitability were supremely and fully wrecked by global financial crisis of 2008/09. Other standout parts of the book are the passages concerning the various businesses that have sprung up around collecting and using personal information. I especially liked Tanner's reporting on Busted Mugshots, whose aggressive business model centers around collecting and posting jail photos, then removing them for a fee. Though clearly demonstrating a distaste for the practice, Tanner credits Busted for "becoming a leader in a field where the major players typically stay hidden, their stories unknown...[founder Kyle] Prall at least had the courage to tell his story in depth and in plain sight,

unlike most of the others who traffic in damaging personal data." Indeed, Tanner's pages spent with Prall make for fascinating reading.

Topical. Well-researched. Some interesting and instructive observations on how "big data" is collected and used, both by company's we grant our permission to, as well as those we don't - or perhaps don't know we are. Some maybe not-so-obvious "problems" with all the collection, and concerns about whether it's all accurate and in context - and challenges getting it corrected when it's not. Couple chapters do kinda' run a little long and a couple points leave have you wondering how they're connected when you read, but it's all summarized and pulled-together well. Even if you are aware of all these things and none leave you surprised that this type of thing is happening, when you put it all together like this and see its' connectedness and scope, it leaves you pondering and maybe a bit disconcerted about how hard it is to keep prying eyes and marketers outta' your personal business.

Tanner writes a thoroughly researched work that touches on a wide range of data gathering and privacy issues in a surprisingly fun and engaging manner. I particularly enjoyed his newspaper journalist investigative style and willingness to aggressively reach out and ask tough questions that were both illuminating and entertaining. I confess that despite having a great interest in this subject, I expected the exposition to be extraordinarily dry and painful. To my delight, it was so good that after reading the first quarter of it for free as a kindle book borrowed from the library, I decided to purchase it and recommend it to a colleague, who also loved it!

As a professor of marketing today, and having been in the profession forever, it is interesting to see where companies are taking this form of marketing intelligence gathering. The future of marketing and marketing research will lie not only in asking consumers questions, but also in listening to them on social media and observing the consumer through all the sources of big data. This is all about one companies amazing use of big data.

Tanner's book is no theoretical text or manifesto. It's a practical, balanced guide on the increasingly important issue of data privacy, something that I've touched on in my own work. Tanner dispels the myth that privacy is a binary and rightfully calls out companies that obfuscate, primarily through byzantine end-user agreements.

I found this riveting - even though it spooked me a bit - made me even more conscious of how our "privacy" is compromised everywhere we turn. I thought it was well written, and the narrative held together. Don't read this if you are feeling paranoid!

So boring, this is like a beach read and/or if you are fairly naive or ignorant about data and privacy as a concept.

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