Do Registrants Care About the Information You Collect?

The majority of the sports organizations that SportsSignup works with share our view and our data policy, which is as follows: **All member data collected during registration is confidential and should never be provided to an outside entity, even if in exchange for money or services, and never without the explicit consent of each member.**

However, some youth sports organizations have decided, on behalf of their members, that it is ok to allow full access to member information to sponsors in exchange for discounted services or other benefits. This means allowing the sponsor to have unfettered access to member (adult and/or child) data including names, Emails, addresses, phone numbers, birthdates, etc.

When asked directly about this, some sports administrators told us that “…our members don’t care about how we use their information, especially if it saves them money or keeps our organization solvent,” or “nobody’s information is private anymore, so it’s not a big deal.”

We thought it would be a good idea to survey actual sports parents on the subject, to get a sense of what they think about data privacy. During the week of February 24, 2014, the Outside the Lines blog team conducted a survey entitled “Data Privacy and Sports,” which was sent out to an opt-in subscriber list of over 300,000 sports families around the United States and Canada. Over 850 people completed the survey, which asked them some basic questions on their expectation of data privacy when completing a registration with their sports organization.

A summary of the survey is shown in this document. You can download the results of the complete survey (see the last page of the document).

More information about the survey:

- Sent by Email to >300,000 opt-in subscribers to Outside the Lines, an Email publication related to sports parenting
- 867 people completed the survey between February 24th and February 28th
- The survey responses were anonymous
- Completing the survey was 100% voluntary
- No prize or award was offered to complete the survey
- Margin of error is approximately 3.5% for any given question (@95% confidence)
**Using Member Information for Commercial Purposes**

When asked about the circumstances information collected about them (registrants) could be used for commercial purposes unrelated to registration, almost half (49.5%/429) of respondents said it was “never ok to use for such purposes,” and almost half (49.5/429) said it was “ok to use, WITH my explicit permission to do so.” See Figure 1, below.

Explicit permission was spelled out to respondents of the survey as follows: “For the purposes of this survey, ‘explicit permission’ means that you clearly understand and agree to the specific terms of how your information will be used, and these specific terms are not hidden somewhere in the ‘fine print.’”

![Figure 1 – Use of Information for Commercial Purposes](image-url)
Privacy of Email Addresses

Overwhelmingly, respondents made it clear that information such as birthdates and addresses should be off limits under any circumstance, but what about their Email address?

A series of questions were asked about Email address privacy. Figure 2, below, shows that the majority (90.7%) of respondents agreed that their Email address is part of their personal information, and “should be treated the same as other information (e.g. home address, phone numbers, etc.)” associated with themselves or their family.

![Figure 2 - Email Privacy](image)

In related questions, the majority (82.5%) of respondents said they Strongly Disagree that sports organizations could use their Email address for “whatever commercial purpose their sports organization decides, WITHOUT their explicit permission.” The majority (92.1%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed that their Email address “should only be used for communicating about the sports program they registered for, and for no other purpose.”
Reading the Fine Print of Registration Vendor Terms

When your registrants complete their forms, they should be presented with the opportunity to review the Privacy Policy of the vendor, and the Privacy Policy of the sports organization (if different). We took a look at the actual Privacy Policy from a sample of registration vendors and found that the following “purposes” were listed, where acceptance of the Privacy Policy was a condition of registration:

- To administer surveys, sweepstakes, contests or promotions
- To conducting research and analysis
- To combining certain Personal Information, customer information and Automated Information collected online and offline, including information collected from third parties
- To transfer or disclosure of such information to affiliates and subsidiaries
- To share with third party businesses and service providers, including marketing and research vendors and various companies that “work with us”
- As we “deem necessary,” for a variety of purposes

As shown in Figure 3, below, survey respondents strongly disapproved of use for the items listed above, whereas the majority approved use for such things as assigning players to teams, completing a background check, and receiving communications from administrators/coaches.

![Figure 3 - Uses of Information](image-url)
Privacy vs. Registration Fees & Operating Costs

As shown in Figure 4, below, an vast majority (96.5%) of respondents said that protecting the privacy of their information submitted during registration was “as important as” or “more important than” reducing the operating costs of their sports organization. Almost half (45.3%) said that privacy was “more important.”

Similarly, an overwhelming majority (95.8%) of respondents said that protecting the privacy of their information submitted during registration was “as important as” or “more important than” keeping registration/participation fees as low as possible. Almost half (41.9%) said that privacy was “more important.”

These results indicate that sports families value their information and their privacy, and would be unlikely to compromise their privacy for the purposes of saving money for themselves (registration/participation fees) or for their organization (operating costs).

Figure 4 - Importance of Data Privacy vs. Operating Costs
Free-form Comments on Data Privacy

Almost 20% (157) of the respondents optionally entered their own comments about how they believe their personal information should be “managed” by the sports organizations they are involved with. The 26 most frequent words used in these responses are shown below:

Access  Ask  Birth  Date  Buy  Care  Credit Card  Destroyed  Email  Explicit Permission  Family  Future  Important  Laws  Organization  Parties  Play  Practices  Profit  Protected  Public  Say  Shared  Sign  Spam  Verify  Volunteering

Some excerpts from the comments are shown below:

“I paid to Participate. I should not be subject to spam mail or unwanted solicitation phone calls for things I do not want.”

“I do NOT want family information used as a marketing tool under any circumstances. We get way to much junk correspondence as it is. A local sporting goods store will periodically offer league members discounts and that gets handled by the league including the store’s link in the league’s newsletter. They don’t need to contact us directly.”

“My information is private and should not be given to anyone without my permission. I don’t want spam or advertisements from other company’s not related. I hate when you sign up for something and then they either sell or give away my e-mail to sponsors that send me advertisement mail.”

“It should not be shared at all unless it is from a coach in my league or a player in my league. Never to be used for anything other than what I signed up for.”

“Personal information should be used for communication between coaches, parents, and teammates. If others wish to obtain personal contact information, authorization to do so should be obtained directly from the parents.”

“my personal information should be used for registration and getting in touch with me about anything that has to deal with the sport my child is in that’s it!!!”

“My information should be held private unless I give specific approval for it to be used by third parties… if the email addresses are going to be sold to keep registration costs down I may want to set up a separate free email account to use during registration to keep my regular email account protected.”

“It should ONLY be used for the organization’s records for purposes of communicating about the event I signed up for and for making sure players are in the proper division.”

“Information gathered/received by the organization should only be used for the organizational purpose of registering, team placement, and background checks. Any use by affiliated or supportive business should be presented in a separate email with the ability to opt-in or opt-out of use of email address.”

“Any required personal information should never be shared with any 3rd party for any reason. If I ever realized this had happened I would never participate with that organization again.”

“Using anyone’s personal info for anything other than what they even ASSUME is the purpose, is arrogant and deceitful.”

“Information should ONLY be used for the purpose for which it was collected. No one wants more solicitations, e-mails or phone calls...”

“My husband and I feel so strongly about our information not being shared without our EXPLICIT permission that we will cut ties with any agency/business that shares our information.”

“Emails should only be given out if they have the explicit permission of the individual.”
Conclusion

The results of this survey show that people signing up for sports programs and events have a clear expectation that their information will be protected by the organization entrusted with it. Sponsorships or other offers for “free” or “discounted” services in exchange for direct access to member information should be avoided to respect the privacy of your members.

Some recommendations for sports organizations with respect to data privacy:

- **Share this information**: Your board should know what members think about their privacy when making business decisions.
- **Be open and honest**: Maintain and publish a formal Privacy Policy for your organization. Tell your members EXACTLY how you will use and protect their information.
- **“Free” is never really free**: Stay clear of sponsorships and other offers for “free” or “discounted” services that provide direct access to your member information.
- **Always get permission**: Never use information for purposes outside your Privacy Policy unless you get explicit permission from each of your members. This does not mean embedding “permission” or “consent” in the fine print of a Terms of Use agreement that nobody reads.
- **Get the right kind of permission**: Sending unsolicited Emails and then expecting members to “opt-out” is NOT the same as getting their permission. Explicit permission should always be obtained before any Emails are sent.
- **Read the fine print**: Your sports organization should fully understand the terms of the agreement with its registration vendor, and should fully understand the terms and privacy policy between the vendor and your members.
- **Provide an alternate registration option**: If your organization decides that it’s ok for your registration vendor to assume ownership of the information for commercial purposes (which would seem unlikely given the results of this survey), provide registrants an alternative way to register (e.g. a paper form) if they don’t agree to how that vendor will use their information.
- **Control your information**: Provide a way for approved sponsors to Email your membership, without having direct access to the information. If they only want to send a few promotional Emails per year, then SEND THEM ON YOUR TERMS THROUGH YOUR SYSTEM, NOT THEIRS.

[Download/Print the Complete Survey Results](#)

If you have any questions about the content of this survey or SportsSignup’s Privacy Policy, please email Privacy@SportsSignup.com or call 1-866-975-8600.