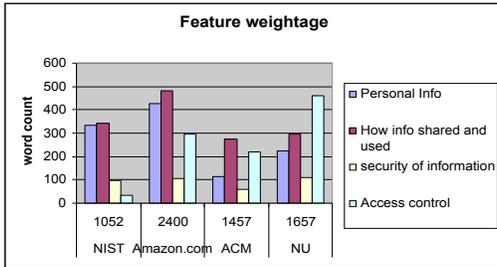


**Introduction:**

A privacy policy informs users of the Web site what the privacy issues and policies are regarding the user's personal data. This memo compares the privacy policies of Amazon.com, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Northeastern University (NU) and Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) on the basis of features that a privacy policy in general should address.

**Comparison of Privacy Policies:**

Each of the four policies includes a description of the personal information which is collected by the site, how the information will be used, with whom it will be shared, and whether the visitors have the option to exercise control over how their information will be used. Issues covered by the policies remain almost the same, except for the way in which they are presented and the stress given to each topic is based on the function of the organization provides.



- Links
- NIST [http://www.nist.gov/public\\_affairs/privacy.htm](http://www.nist.gov/public_affairs/privacy.htm)
  - Amazon <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/468496/C>
  - ACM <http://www.acm.org/serving/acm-privacy.html>
  - NU <http://www.alumni.neu.edu/privacy.html>

Figure 1: Word Count metric

NIST and ACM policies primarily show that the user’s private information is given the high importance. Amazon policy serves as a notice about which practices the user is accepting. NU policy focuses more on delivery of ‘electronic services’ while protecting privacy and security of user information.

**1. Personal Information:**

NIST does not track or record personal information about individuals and their visits. Amazon.com stores personal information provided by user in any form, includes name, address, phone no, credit card information, email address of user and the person to whom the order is shipped. ACM maintains member databases that contain mailing, billing, and member profile information, as well as a record of each member's product and service purchases. NU only collects only personal information required in order to process a request. Each site collects IP address, Internet domain, type of browser and operating system, date and time, pages visited, address of web-site visited from the website automatically when user visits the webpage.

NIST	Amazon	ACM	NU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- automatically</li> <li>- voluntarily provided by user</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-automatically</li> <li>-voluntarily provided</li> <li>-cookies</li> <li>-e-mails</li> <li>-‘other sources’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-automatically*</li> <li>-registrations /filling forms for ACM activities.</li> <li>-cookies at restricted portions of web-site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-automatically</li> <li>- information collected while making donations or payments</li> </ul>

Table 2: Ways in which personal information is collected

\* “Other than in the restricted-access portions of ACM's site that requires an ACM Web Account, ACM does not log the identity of visitors. However, we may keep access logs, for example containing a visitor's IP address and search queries”- **ACM**

**2. Information collection:**

Amazon, ACM have more methods of collecting information about user and customizing his experience as compared to NU and NIST due to the nature of service provided

NIST	Amazon	ACM	NU

-to make the site more useful for visitors -to count visitors -to know the technology used by visitors	- to personalize and improve the shopping experience of the customer -to prevent and detect fraud - to offer certain credit or financial services to some customers -to make emails more useful	- to improve their offerings - to process orders, mail invoices, purchases, renewal notices, and announcements -to respond to member inquiries	- to deliver services and information personalized to user
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Table 2: Why is information collected?

**3. Information use and retention:**

“We make every effort to disclose clearly how information is used at the point where it is collected so you can determine whether you wish to provide the information” –**NIST**

“Information about customers is important part of our business, and we are not in the business of selling it to others.”–**Amazon**

“All personally identifiable information contained in ACM membership, purchase, and registration databases is treated as confidential and will be used only for the purposes stated in this policy, except where required by law.” –**ACM**

“We do not use personal information for any commercial or philanthropic purpose not directly connected with or approved by the university.” – **NU**

<b>NIST</b>	<b>Amazon</b>	<b>ACM</b>	<b>NU</b>
<b>Yes/No*</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Not specified</b>

Table 3: Information retained?

\* “Electronically submitted information is maintained and destroyed according to the principles of the Federal Records Act and the records schedules approved by the National Archives and Records Administration, and in some cases information submitted to us may become an agency record and might be subject to a Freedom of Information Act request.” - **NIST**

<sup>1</sup>“Member records are maintained as long as an individual is an ACM member and for two years following a membership lapse”

**4. Information Sharing:**

<b>NIST</b>	<b>Amazon</b>	<b>ACM</b>	<b>NU</b>
- not shared except when it becomes an agency record, it is subject to Freedom of Information Act request.	-with its subsidiaries having similar or more protective privacy policies. -with third parties authorized by the user to receive info. -with businesses that acquire a store or business unit from Amazon as a transferred asset.	- shared with outside contractors, auditors, consultants, and others hired by ACM to assist in carrying out financial or operational activities. -with other ACM members and ACM Special Interest Group.	- with others inside and outside university helping to process the information

Table 4: With whom information is shared?

Amazon, NU and ACM state that they may disclose personal information collected in response to a valid legal process while there is no such mention in NIST policy.

**5. Information control:**

<b>NIST</b>	<b>Amazon</b>	<b>ACM</b>	<b>NU</b>
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Not specified	- to view account and interaction information  -to update certain information.	-to correct and change their membership information.  -to make only the information desired as public  - requires username and password to log on web account and use the 'search' facility.	-right to request access to personal information  -right to request removal of personal information from the university.
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Table 5: What access controls does the user have over his information?

ACM and Amazon allow user to make changes to profile independently, while NU allows user to access, change or remove information pertinent to him from system subject to approval of request. NU policy also describes the procedure for submitting a request, contact information and conditions when request may be denied.

**6 Information security:**

NIST	Amazon	ACM	NU
-monitors network traffic to identify unauthorized attempts <sup>2</sup> to upload or change information, or otherwise cause damage to Government Computer System	-SSL to encrypt user input during transmission  -only last 5 digits of credit card revealed.  -advises user to protect against unauthorized access	- provides reasonable and appropriate security controls to protect personal information against foreseeable hazards	- SSL (Secure Sockets Layer protocol) with 128-bit encryption for secure transactions.

<sup>2</sup>NIST and makes unauthorized attempts punishable under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and NIIPA

**7. Cookies**

Each policy has a special mention of cookies. NIST, Amazon and NU define them and state the type of cookies used, while ACM just quotes “Cookies are only set when users visit restricted portions of our website”

**8. Policy for email/postal address and messages:** “ACM does not sell, rent, or exchange email addresses of its members and customers. All ACM created and supported email distribution lists have "unsubscribe" instructions.

NIST	Amazon	ACM	NU
- Email used to respond to message  - To provide requested service.	- compare customer lists to lists received from other companies, to avoid sending unnecessary messages to customers.  - can opt out by changing configuration settings.	-follows email policy to send updates & messages  - postal mail policies to rent addresses to authorized organizations	-email address used-only to acknowledge a payment  - shared with people inside and outside university who help processing the info.

Table 7: Email and Postal mail usage

**9. Accessibility/Availability of website:**

NIST is committed to make its website available to all its customers and staff according to section 508 of the rehabilitation Act Ammendments of 1998. NIST has some information is for children under 13 years. Information on NIST site is public, expect where copyrighted. Amazon.com adheres to the Safe Harbor Privacy Principles agreed upon by the U.S. and the European Union. “Amazon.com does not sell products for purchase by children. We sell children's products for purchase by adults. If you are under 18, you may use Amazon.com only with the involvement of a parent or guardian” –Amazon. ACM and NU policies state no such restriction . Northeastern and Amazon.com privacy policies are subject to change. Each of the four policies provides a way for the user to get in touch with the appropriate authority if needed.

**Conclusion**

The four privacy policies were compared and any suggestions or comments for improvement are welcome.