

IN-DEPTH

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Top 10 most embarrassing data breaches

Inspired by a notable security gaffe at BP, we give our rundown of the most embarrassing data breaches in recent memory.

by: [Tom Brewster](#) 1 Apr 2011

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This one brings a wry smile to the face. Early last year, a [database containing contact details of 170,000 workers of oil giant Royal Dutch Shell was emailed to campaigning groups](#) opposed to the company's activities.

As for how the data was leaked, it was thought to be the work of a disgruntled insider a threat all businesses need to look out for.

Seven non-governmental groups including human rights groups and environmental campaigners, such as Greenpeace plus anti-Shell campaigning website royaldutchshellplc.com received the database details.

The data included names, telephone numbers and further details on permanent and contract employees. Not hugely important data in itself, but you can't deny the recipients of the leak makes this a rather interesting case.

8. BNP breach

It was another disaffected employee who embarrassed the British National Party back in 2008 when they published a membership list online.

Following the leak by an ex-senior member of the party, members of the controversial political group said they received threatening and abusive phone calls and emails.

It came at a time when the BNP was looking to make a name for itself as a viable entity. The breach only made them look a little unstable from within.

When party leader Nick Griffin started claiming the Labour Party was behind the threatening calls as part of a "dirty tricks campaign," it came across as somewhat desperate.

You see, managing the aftermath of a data breach is as important as how you deal with it at the time. Griffin didn't come across as the calm and collected leader many IT heads and CEOs manage to pull off following data losses.

7. English Defence League hack

Well if we were going to mention the BNP breach we had to do the English Defence League (EDL) one too, right?

In this more recent incident, [an EDL database was hacked](#) and members' information was stolen by a group known as the Mujahideen Hacking Unit.

Admittedly, the EDL handled the breach somewhat better than Griffin did. The far-right group simply apologised and warned members names and addresses had been taken both from its clothing site and the organisation's donation database.

The hack may have been inspired by the EDL's involvement in the furore surrounding the Koran-burning American preacher Pastor Terry Jones, who was due to attend an EDL rally in February.

The EDL decided to cancel the rally but no reasons were given at the time as to why. Either way, the group's opponents were left smirking, whilst the EDL had to pick up the pieces looking a little rosy around the cheeks and not in the good way.

6. ACS:Law

ACS:Law was under enough scrutiny as it was before [suffering a harmful data breach](#).

The firm had been sending out thousands of letters to people its clients suspected of illegally sharing copyrighted content an action that brought heavy criticism from numerous sides.

The leaked data was actually stored by the law firm to track P2P users sharing copyrighted pornographic films, possibly illegally.

Activists from 4chan, the image board website where Anonymous often hangs out, were behind the hack, but many pointed the finger at ACS:Law itself.

Privacy International claimed ACS:Law breached the Data Protection Act by allowing an archive containing sensitive data to be stored on a public facing web server, and the ICO said it was going to investigate.

The breach was another nail in the coffin for the law firm, which has now folded altogether.

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