

## Have marketers become spies?

**Level:** Pre-intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of *either* Article A or Article B per student; one copy of the rest of the worksheet and vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 3/2014. The article is about whether consumers are aware of how much they are being spied on and how their digital data is used. The main question posed is whether marketers have turned into spies. Two experts – one from the US and one from the UK – give their professional opinions and back these up with facts and arguments.

The tasks in the student worksheet will help the students to understand the content of the article and the language used. Extra questions are provided for discussion.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

### Lead-in

Students are asked to define three words connected to the article. Doing this will ensure that they understand the vocabulary and get them thinking about spying and spies.

**Key:**

From <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

*a spy* – (noun) someone whose job is to find out secret information about a country or an organization

The company realised that there was a spy in the production department.

*to spy* – (verb) to find out secret information about a country or an organization

He was accused of spying for a foreign government.

*espionage* – (noun) attempts to discover your enemy's political, military or industrial secrets using secret methods; someone who does this is a spy.

He was accused of espionage.

### Extension task

Ask students to think of words that go with the three given words, e.g. political espionage, industrial espionage, etc.

### Key words

Divide the students into two groups. Group A should work with Article A and Group B with Article B.

In their groups, students match the key words from their article to their meanings and find them in the article to read them in context. After they have agreed on the answers they should share this vocabulary information with students from the other group.

**Key:**

**Article A**

1. track; 2. monitoring; 3. scrutiny; 4. mouseprint; 5. policies;
6. vague; 7. predictive; 8. harvest; 9. exploit; 10. wrath

**Article B**

1. digital signature; 2. insight; 3. less visible; 4. density;
5. mutual; 6. end user; 7. incentives; 8. ethical;
9. demographics; 10. anonymity

### Exchanging information

First of all, the students from each group should decide what the main arguments are in their article. Then they should explain these points to another student who has the other article.

Working in pairs or small groups, all the students then write the main arguments from both articles into the table. After they have done this they should decide whose opinion they most agree with.

## Have marketers become spies?

Key:

### Yes (Article A)

*Marketers have always been spies.*

*Marketers can track every move that consumers make and use the knowledge gained to control the information that these consumers receive.*

*Marketers fool themselves into believing that consumers want to be spied on.*

*Customers click 'I approve' buttons because they do not read the small print.*

*Marketers do not inform consumers about how their personal data is gathered and used.*

*Most company policies are vague about what they will be able to do with the information they gather once technology improves.*

*Marketers are using new tools to reach further into people's lives.*

*The main danger for companies is that consumers might not only reject the technology but also the brands that are pushing the technology. In order to avoid this, regulations should be put into place.*

### No (Article B)

*These days we are all aware that we leave digital signatures and that these can and will be used by marketers.*

*The benefits of the digital world are unquestionable. For example, they mean that we only get sent relevant offers and promotions (according to our shopping habits).*

*Marketing is not spying as it provides mutual benefit for advertisers and consumers (whereas spying is one-sided).*

*There are EU privacy laws that help guide the ethical use of data collection.*

*Consumers have the power to stop buying from a firm they think is misusing their personal data.*

*Face detection software does not record individual people, only which demographic group they belong to. Anonymity is ensured.*

*The insights gained from the data improve and enrich consumers' lives.*

*The majority of people welcome digital advertising.*

## Verbs or nouns?

Students are asked to go through the two parts of the article and find everyday words that can be used and understood in more than one way. In the context of the article, they should decide whether the given words are used as verbs or nouns.

Key:

### Article A

*move N; control V; shame V; fool V; spy V; claim V; support V; click V; limit N; reach N; search N; reject V; harvest V; group N*

### Article B

*use V; content N; benefit N; guide V; firm N; surface N; type N; record V; age N; store N; work V; group V; power N; gain V; welcome V*

### Teaching and learning strategy: verbs or nouns?

The awareness-raising task above shows us that many English words, which at first glance seem to be everyday and low level, have more than one meaning and can be used in different ways. In order to know whether the word used is a verb or a noun, the student has to be able to understand the sentence. Simple-looking words can actually turn out to be more complex than you first assume.

Some of the words don't only change their meaning but also their stress patterns depending on whether they are used as verbs or nouns. In task 4, look carefully at the words *reject* and *record* to see how their stress pattern changes depending on which category of word they are.

To extend the above task and to help students engage with the frequently used words, when you come across ambiguous words (from the students' point of view), ask the students to define both meanings of the words – as we did with 'spy' in task 1.

## Expressions

Students should try to remember how the expressions were used in the article, discuss their meanings, look up any that they are not sure about, and then write sentences of their own that include the expressions that they would like to be able to integrate into their active vocabulary.

## Have marketers become spies?

### Key:

#### Article A

*to put someone to shame = to embarrass someone*

We put the US government's spies to shame ...

*to fool someone into thinking something = to trick someone into believing something*

We fool ourselves into thinking consumers have asked us to spy on them.

*on demand = to be available when it's wanted*

They may want meaningful content on demand, but we've never told them what they must give up for that.

*to save someone from themselves = to stop someone from doing something stupid*

This will not only save marketers from themselves, but perhaps also save us from our customers' wrath.

#### Article B

*on the surface = if you don't look too closely at what is happening and just see what is there at first glance*

*While on the surface, this might seem like Big Brother ...*

*Big Brother = a person or organization that watches people all the time and tries to control everything they say or do.*

*This expression comes from 'Big Brother', the name of the political leader in Nineteen Eighty-Four, a novel by the British writer George Orwell. In the book, the leader's picture and the message 'Big Brother is watching you' are found everywhere.*

## Discussion

These questions relate directly to the main reading text and allow students to bring in and discuss their own personal opinions about, and attitudes towards, the topic addressed in the article.

## Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

## Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Good connections

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/good-connections/552310.article>

Marketing: Segmentation

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/esp/marketing/segmentation/>

You may also find topical and relevant Guardian news lessons here on onestopenglish:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/>

Bill that would allow NSA data collection to continue  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/weekly-topical-news-lessons/2013-weekly-news-lesson-archive/weekly-news-lesson-365-21st-november-2013-bill-that-would-allow-nsa-data-collection-to-continue/553229.article>

## Have marketers become spies?

### 1 Lead-in

Write a definition plus an example sentence for each of these words.

a spy

to spy

espionage

### 2 Key words

Match the words from either Article A or B to their meanings and find them in your half of the article to read them in context. Then underline the main stressed syllable and check you can pronounce all the words.

exploit  
predictive

harvest  
scrutiny

monitoring  
track

mouseprint  
vague

policies  
wrath

1. follow someone and see what they do \_\_\_\_\_
2. regularly checking something or watching someone in order to find out what is happening \_\_\_\_\_
3. careful examination of someone or something \_\_\_\_\_
4. the details of something such as a contract that are printed in very small text and often contain conditions that limit your rights \_\_\_\_\_
5. a set of plans or actions agreed on by a government, political party, business or other group \_\_\_\_\_
6. not clearly or fully explained \_\_\_\_\_
7. relating to a technology that guesses and finishes the word that a computer or mobile phone user is typing before they have finished typing it \_\_\_\_\_
8. to collect or obtain something \_\_\_\_\_
9. to use information so that you get benefit from it, even if it is wrong or unfair to do this \_\_\_\_\_
10. very great anger \_\_\_\_\_

anonymity  
ethical

demographics  
incentives

density  
insight

digital signature  
less visible

end user  
mutual

1. clues about our identity \_\_\_\_\_
2. a chance to understand something or learn more about it \_\_\_\_\_
3. something that people do not immediately see or that they are not aware of \_\_\_\_\_
4. the amount of something in a place \_\_\_\_\_
5. felt in the same way by two or more people \_\_\_\_\_
6. someone who buys and uses a product \_\_\_\_\_
7. things that make you want to do something because you know that you will benefit by doing this \_\_\_\_\_
8. involving the principles used for deciding what is right and what is wrong \_\_\_\_\_
9. the particular features of a population, for example people's age or race \_\_\_\_\_
10. a situation in which the name of a person is not known or is kept secret \_\_\_\_\_

## Have marketers become spies?

### Have marketers become spies?

Article A



**YES!**

“Marketers put the  
US government’s spies  
to shame”

JONATHAN  
SALEM BASKIN

Worse, most company policies on how consumer data will be used are vague, meaning that there’s no limit to what we might do once a new technology becomes available.

We marketers are continually extending our reach into consumers’ lives through new tools like location tracking, machine learning and predictive search. We want the world to trust us that we’ll track them fairly but we control the right to decide what ‘fair’ means.

Just wait until consumers decide they don’t like what we say it means. Consumers’ reactions could make responses to the US spying scandal seem mild. They could reject not only our technology but also the brands we are pushing using that technology.

Other markets have done just fine with regulations. Certification requirements create trustworthy markets for health, law and other professional services.

Consumers’ personal data should not be a resource for marketers to harvest and exploit. In the data marketplace, consumers are a major participant group – one that has been denied information, protection and, thereby, full freedom of choice.

We need the government to provide the regulatory framework so that it can function fairly. This will not only save marketers from themselves but perhaps also save us from our customers’ wrath.

**JONATHAN SALEM BASKIN** is a brand and reputation expert based in the US. His eighth book, *The End of Anonymity*, will be published this year.

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- 1 We marketers have always been spies, only bad ones. Now, we have the technology to know everything we ever wanted to know about our customers. We can track their every move, online or off, and use that knowledge to control the information they receive. We put the US government’s spies to shame and we’re very proud of our newly found powers.
- 2 We fool ourselves into thinking consumers have asked us to spy on them. They may want meaningful content on demand (they always have) but we’ve never told them what they must give up for that.
- 3 Do we marketers really think our neighbours or family know how closely they’re being watched or just how that monitoring changes what they actually see online?
- 4 Of course not, and we are fooling ourselves when we claim that customers support this scrutiny because they click ‘I approve’ buttons. They do so because it is easier than reading the privacy mouseprint.
- 5 We are experts at making sure that consumers understand the details of how a deodorant works but we see to it that they stay uninformed about how their personal data is gathered and used.

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## Have marketers become spies?

### Have marketers become spies?

Article B



**NO!**

“Power rests in the hands of the consumer”  
**MIKE HEMMINGS**

directives help guide the ethical use of data. But consumers have powers themselves. They can stop buying from a firm they feel is misusing their data.

Our firm, Amscreen, uses face detection software in advertising screens. While on the surface, this might seem like Big Brother, in reality, this type of software does not recognize individuals or record data. It simply identifies age and sex, and then groups this insight to provide trends about what kinds of consumers are likely to go into a store.

This allows for more relevant content on the screen. It also provides a far clearer idea of the type of person seeing the ad, as well as where and when. We cannot and would not identify or track individuals.

Mobile and online advertisers work similarly. They also group individuals based on habits, demographics and so on, which ensures anonymity.

While technology evolves, the ‘spying’ debate will continue, but in the end, the power rests in the hands of the consumer. If data owners keep using the insights they gain to improve and enrich our lives, as they currently do, the majority of people will continue to welcome digital advertising in all its forms.

**MIKE HEMMINGS** is the international marketing director for Amscreen, a UK outdoor advertising screen business, which does business in the UK and across Europe.

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- 1 As 21st-century consumers, we are all aware that every step we take leaves some form of digital signature, providing opportunities for data owners to use this insight in many different ways.
- 2 The simple fact is that the digital world is part of our lives and its benefits are unquestionable. Some of these are more obvious – our grocery shopping history allows supermarkets to send us relevant offers and promotions. But there are less visible, even more important uses, such as being able to identify traffic jams, based on the density of GPS-activated mobile phones.
- 3 So, can we really call the collection and use of data to provide relevant content for consumers ‘spying’? No, spying does not provide a mutual benefit for both parties, as it does for advertisers and consumers. For digital advertising to be effective, it must deliver something useful for the end user so they want to react to it.
- 4 There are now more incentives to use this data in a positive way than ever before. The latest EU privacy laws and

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## Have marketers become spies?

### 3 Exchanging information

- a. Tell another student about the main arguments made by the author of your article including what they see as the dangers and benefits to consumers.
- b. Write the main arguments from both Articles A and B into the table.

Yes, marketers have become spies	No, they haven't

- c. Who do you agree with more? Why?

### 4 Verbs or nouns?

Find these everyday words in Articles A and B, and decide whether they are verbs or nouns. Write *V* or *N* next to each one.

#### Article A

- track  
  move  
  control  
  shame  
  fool  
  spy  
  claim  
  support  
 click  
 limit  
 reach  
 search  
 reject  
 harvest  
 group

#### Article B

- step  
  use  
  content  
  benefit  
  guide  
  firm  
  surface  
  type  
 record  
 age  
 store  
 work  
 group  
 power  
 gain  
 welcome

## Have marketers become spies?

### 5 Expressions

a. Can you remember how these expressions were used in the article? Discuss their meanings and look up any that you are not sure about.

b. Write sentences of your own that include the expressions you would like to use confidently in the future.

- *to put someone to shame*
- *to fool someone into thinking something*
- *on demand*
- *to save someone from themselves*
- *on the surface*
- *Big Brother*

### 6 Further discussion questions

Discuss the following questions.

- Do you feel that you are being spied on when you go about your everyday life?
- Do you have any online store accounts or any customer cards from shops or other businesses?
- Is there anything we can do to protect ourselves from marketers? Do we even want to protect ourselves from them?
- Should we try to protect our data and our identity, or should we just accept that this is how it is these days?
- Do you think your answers depend on your age? Why might this make a difference to our attitudes?

