February 21, 2012, *5:34 am*

**Should Companies Collect Information About You?**

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*It is no secret that companies collect information on current and potential customers. How do you feel about that? Do you feel it invades your privacy? How have stores where you shop tracked your shopping habits? Do you get special offers because you shop in certain places?*

In the Sunday Magazine article ”How Companies Learn Your Secrets,” Charles Duhigg describes how companies gather and use information on their customers to boost sales:

The desire to collect information on customers is not new for Target or any other large retailer, of course. For decades, Target has collected vast amounts of data on every person who regularly walks into one of its stores. Whenever possible, Target assigns each shopper a unique code — known internally as the Guest ID number — that keeps tabs on everything they buy. “If you use a credit card or a coupon, or ﬁll out a survey, or mail in a refund, or call the customer help line, or open an e-mail we’ve sent you or visit our Web site, we’ll record it and link it to your Guest ID,” Pole said. “We want to know everything we can.”

Also linked to your Guest ID is demographic information like your age, whether you are married and have kids, which part of town you live in, how long it takes you to drive to the store, your estimated salary, whether you’ve moved recently, what credit cards you carry in your wallet and what Web sites you visit. Target can buy data about your ethnicity, job history, the magazines you read, if you’ve ever declared bankruptcy or got divorced, the year you bought (or lost) your house, where you went to college, what kinds of topics you talk about online, whether you prefer certain brands of coffee, paper towels, cereal or applesauce, your political leanings, reading habits, charitable giving and the number of cars you own. (In a statement, Target declined to identify what demographic information it collects or purchases.) All that information is meaningless, however, without someone to analyze and make sense of it. That’s where Andrew Pole and the dozens of other members of Target’s Guest Marketing Analytics department come in.

**Assignment:** Pick a specific company that gathers data and google information about how they do this. Create a powerpoint that tells me what you think about the role of marketing in your life. Do you see any benefits, like receiving discounts or special offers that come from companies studying your shopping habits? What disadvantages do you see to having your purchasing habits tracked? What changes would you make—it any—in regard to information-gathering?