

Success Story | BigBrotherAwards

Bernd Sieker : 3-4 minutes

Since 2000, Digitalcourage organises the BigBrotherAwards in Germany, the “Oscars for surveillance” (Le Monde). Through the BigBrotherAwards, the Payback loyalty card was exposed as a data collection scheme, urine tests for apprentices at Bayer were subjected to scrutiny, goings-on at the road toll operator TollCollect and online retailer Tchibo’s dealings with customer addresses were highlighted. We uncovered how retail conglomerate Metro were hiding RFID chips in customer cards and pointed out why Facebook is such a threat. Employee surveillance keeps turning up on our radar – for example, we were able to inform workers at H&M and Lidl how their employers were collecting private information about them. And two weeks after receiving their award, fashion retailer H&M was given a fine of 35,258,707.95 Euro (more than 35 million) for these transgressions.

The BigBrotherAwards have often been ahead of their time. When Rena Tangens and padeluun said in 2013 that “Google must be broken up”, this was a radical demand, and we had to wait until 2014 before politicians and journalists echoed the call. Several Big Tech companies have received a BigBrotherAward by now, as we do not shy away from the big issues. Also, we do not spare faithful fans of companies with a problematic record on privacy. So in 2020 we gave a BigBrotherAward to Susanne Eisenmann, the then Education Minister in the south-western state of Baden-Württemberg, for her plans to incorporate Microsoft 365 into the state’s education platform. The attention generated for this (with all due respect) stupid idea soon led to other critical comments, and finally the use of this software was ruled in Baden-Württemberg schools. The debate in the other States in Germany is still ongoing, but this shows that once an issue has got rolling, it can soon gather pace.

In the aftermath of the Snowden revelations, the BigBrotherAwards have not lost in relevance. Every year we raise thorny issues and set benchmarks, in society and politics.

A look back on success stories at the 20th anniversary of the Big Brother Awards in a (German) video: [20 years of BigBrotherAwards](#)

In a compelling, entertaining and accessible format, we present these negative awards to companies, organisations, and politicians. The BigBrotherAwards highlight privacy and data protection offenders in business and politics, or as the French paper Le Monde once put it, they are the “Oscars for data leeches”.

Organised by (among others):

BigBrotherAwards International

The BigBrotherAwards are an international project: Questionable practices have been decorated with these awards [in 19 countries](#) so far.