

Ethical Scenario: 2/25/2025

You are a computer engineer who has recently developed an app which helps users keep track of medical information, doctor's appointments, and prescriptions. Information about the user is stored in this app, including what prescriptions they are taking and how frequently they schedule doctor's appointments. As the developer of the app, you and your company have access to this information. The marketing department requests that you supply them with customer-specific information so they can better target ads and app suggestions to the users. You understand that you are part of a company, but also feel that the privacy of the app users should be protected. Additionally, you feel that as an engineer, you should be responsible to those who use your technology.

1) How do you determine how much of the user's information should be shared with marketing?

Provide a plan in your response using specific ideas. (6 points)

2) Is this an ethical use of information or a violation of the user's privacy? Think about how other companies use private data, how could this data be abused? (6 points)

3) What are the possible implications, for you and your company, regarding misuse of the data?

Provide examples of specific laws surrounding personal medical data. (6 points)

1) The answer of how much of the user's information can be shared with marketing is zero, it is highly illegal to share any PII (personally identifiable information) relating to health.

Consequences to breaking PII rule are extremely severe which includes hundreds of thousands in fines, possible jail time and possible license revocations even if it is an accident . My plan for my response is to immediately go to my supervisor/exhaust all internal procedures and report this

issue and its consequences then later email a recap of the summaries of this meeting for documentation purposes. If they do not agree with me and continue their misuse of PII, I will have no choice but to report this to the medical boards/authorities. If the issue is still persisting then I would have to go public about the issues relating to PII.

2) It is generally unethical to violate the user's privacy and may break the user's trust and laws. It is unethical as there was no consent to the abuse of their privacy. If the users knew that their data was going to be violated then they probably would not be customers themselves it would be a form of lying to people who use the product. No one wants their data to be violated so clearly it is unethical to do so. Other companies can buy private data easily and exploit the data for their own profit, such as having ads centered around what the user wants. Data like this can also be sold directly to people; one notable site that does this is usphonebook.com where a huge amount of people's information is leaked. One can easily search a name and it would return that person's address, phone numbers, emails, family, and distant relatives all for free and a lot more like criminal records, financial history and mobile carrier for a couple bucks.

3) So possible implications for me and the company regarding the misuse of user's data. There would be some fines/lawsuits and some distrust with doing so. There are obviously laws and regulations around the user's privacy however it is not enforced well. A trespasser knowing going somewhere he is not allowed to but does know that there is no enforcement stopping them. Many companies see the law/regulations but only see where things are enforced. An example of this is 23andme where they do genetic testing and do not care about securing the user's DNA. They have all their data extremely unsecured and easily hackable and had their data sold and leaked to other companies. In the end they ended up getting some fines and only got a slap in the wrist.