

Author: Robbie Young

To be, or not to be (a good Samaritan). I was first faced with this issue at my current employment, Beerz, an early-stage startup which is centered around connecting local breweries with local beer enthusiasts. Our initial launch of 1.0 was met with amazing feedback, and we are now pursuing the release of 2.0 with new and exciting features, of which I have been placed as the lead developer of. Versions 1.0 through 1.9 were developed while maintaining user privacy, but now we are faced with deciding between continuing this preservation of user data or introducing monetization of said user data. Version 2.0 includes the release of showing brewery popularity among other Beerz 2.0 users within the past week, and for each individual brewery to show other popular similar breweries among Beerz 2.0 users. This would require the collection and storing of location data for at least one week, and we are now unsure whether to scrub all user data after a week or rather store data and sell it to other third parties.

There are several people who are involved and are worth considering in this decision. The first grouping of peoples are the higher ups at Beerz, the ones who have personal financial or moral investments in the company, such as the CEO and CTO of the company. These people either started the company themselves or have invested their own personal time and money into the company, and therefore hold both the legal and moral right to make this final decision themselves. The second grouping of peoples are the other employees at Beerz, including myself. We may currently be employed at Beerz, and even if happy with our employment, we currently do not hold anything more at stake than a stable financial check. The third grouping of peoples are the users of Beerz themselves. The introduction of monetizing these people's personal data directly affects them as they are the ones whose data are going to be stored and potentially sold off to the highest bidder.

There are a few different paths the company can take. First, and possibly the simplest in the sense of implementation and controversiality, would be to not implement this update at all. The good side of this is that user's data is not sold off to third parties and their privacy is maintained. However, Beerz would lose potential profit and our projected growth will likely fall behind other competitors, due to less innovation and improvements. The second option would be to fully

implement these changes, and not care about the privacy of the users at all. This in turn would generate the most profit for the company, however, would also generate the greatest loss in user privacy. The third option would be to partially monetize user's data. This in turn would create additional cashflow for Beerz, and would also, to some extent, protect the users.

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) has their own [Code of Ethics](#), which discusses many of the present issues in this decision. Of their code, there are three main pertinent sections, being Sections 1.2 (Avoid harm), 1.3 (Be honest and trustworthy), and 1.6 (Respect privacy); although other sections do apply to this situation as well, these three are reflected the most in this situation. Section 1.2 defines "harm" as anything with negative consequences, and applied to Beerz and its collection of location data, users can be effected by direct negative consequences if their location data is stored and sold. Although Beerz has no malicious intent towards our users ourselves, if we were to sell users location data, especially if that data was tied individually to each specific user, there could be vast consequences included but not limited to being stalked or creating a [Doxing file](#). Section 1.3 applied to Beerz relates directly to whether our users know what is being done with their data. We should both let our users know what we are doing with their data and be transparent about the specifics. Section 1.6 directly relates with privacy. Collecting location data may be vital to features within Beerz, however anything past this without user's consent is a violation of this section.

There are also several items of which I wish I were more knowledgeable about surrounding this topic. Arguably the most important, from an investors point of view, is the differences in profit and growth of the company between the different paths we could take. This would allow us to make a more informed decision and have a clearer image of how much potential would be lost. Similarly, I would also prefer to have more information about other competitors in this space, as a loss in profit would allow for other competitors to get a larger share of the market faster than we could. I would also like to know what a potential buyer of the data would like to do with the user's data, as this can greatly influence the decision of whether to sell the data or not. Lastly, I would like to know specifically what other data we keep, aside from the potential introduction of storing location data. Location data can be dangerous by itself, but in tangent with other data can be even worse if sold to the wrong side.

My final recommendation is as follows: I would implement these new features for Beerz 2.0 and would partially monetize the storing of location data. I would also make sure that the company to which we would sell the data to has no malicious intent with the user's location data. The data would be stored in such a way that no data can be individually traced back to a certain individual, and as well as allow for all users to become aware that their data is being stored this way with the ability to opt out. In my experience, most users either are unaware that their data is being tracked, or they are aware but do not fully care, as the cost of using the service is outweighed by the service itself. This way, the users who are unaware become aware, and once aware can decide themselves. People would now be able to enjoy the new features of Beerz 2.0, and the company would still create extra revenue and will hopefully give me a raise (and of course grow further and capture more of the market, by expanding their reach and reinvesting profits).