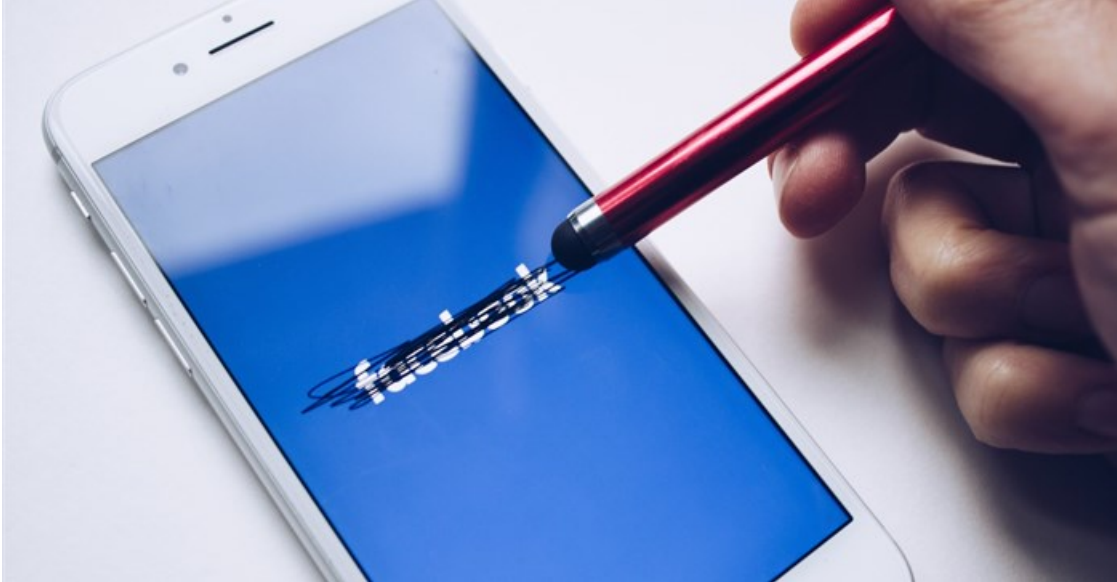


# Privacy - The new luxury purchase

By  Bronwyn Williams

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In the wake of the recent Facebook scandal that revealed how Cambridge Analytical (a political data company which played an instrumental role in the US 2016 election) had gained improper access to the sensitive, personal information of up to 87 million Facebook users, consumers around the world are waking up to the value of personal privacy.



Thought Catalog

Havas' latest Prosumer Report, iLife, reported 85% South Africans worry that they do not know what companies do with data and information.



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However, in the digital era, privacy comes at a price. A price that, increasingly, only the rich can afford to pay.

Poor and middle-class consumers, in particular, have traded away their privacy rights in exchange for connections and connectivity.

Everyone has their price. A survey by Intel Security found that 77% of consumers would be happy to trade data in exchange for discounts or coupons from cellular service providers.

For example, while wealthy individuals can afford private fibre internet lines and premium software programmes, poorer people sell their personal information in exchange for logging in to insecure public Wi-Fi services and accessing “free” Facebook apps.

## **Digital privacy divide**

While cash-strapped drivers succumb to installing vehicle tracking systems that monitor their driving performance, and wearable tracking devices that monitor their physical activity in exchange for good-behaviour-discounts from insurers; those who can afford to opt out can continue living their lives in un-tracked and un-traced.

In a similar way digitised social welfare programmes, including China’s new Social Credit Score system and Australia’s cashless welfare card programme, trace and trace state beneficiaries spending habits and whereabouts in ways that people who do not rely on state benefits can avoid.

This digital privacy divide is nothing new: After all, we all know how middle-class workers get their salaries paid into heavily regulated, Fica’d bank accounts, while the elite access their trust funds via anonymous offshore Swiss bank accounts (Panama Papers type leaks, of course, withstanding).

These days though, there are a host of new ways to pay for privacy - if you can afford it. Here are some of the ways the 1% are paying to stay out of the view of prying eyes.

## **Pay privacy tax**

You can simply pay big brother to leave you alone. In London, a group of over 200 wealthy landowners have opted to pay a £218,200 a year penalty tax in exchange for not disclosing which of London’s £20m-plus mega-mansions they own.

Privacy “taxes” are not limited to exclusive real estate either. Thanks to new internet legislation, you can soon expect to pay a “privacy premium” to your Internet services provider in order to prevent your data from being accessed and sold to third parties.

## **Build an invisible lair**

If you are rich enough, you can hire an architect to build you an invisible home. JaK Studio, an architecture firm is developing construction methods that make their wealthy clients’ homes appear to disappear. One method involves cladding the houses in specially designed mirrors that reflect surroundings and disguise the building’s true scale and form. Other architects will simply build you your very own underground, subterranean James-bond-villain-style lair.

## **Go off-grid (and Google Maps)**

You can move to a hidden community. Hidden communities, including Hidden Hills in Los Angeles where Justin Bieber and Kim Kardashian reside, and Three Rivers Recreation Area in Oregon forbid Google’s Street View photography vehicles from accessing the streets or photographing the estates from the air. Property prices start in the \$5m-plus price range.

## **Hire a digital detective**

If someone accesses your personal information or published something you don’t like about you online, you can pay a digital sleuthing company to make the leak go away. These companies promise to control your digital identity by eliminating scandals and bad press. Expect to pay \$50,000 and \$300,000 per project, plus a monthly maintenance cost for the service.

## Switch to secret social media

If Facebook, Tinder and Instagram are too public for you, you can pay to join the private social media platforms of the uber-rich. Rich Kids, for example, is an alternative to Instagram that keeps common prying eyes away from your selfies by charging \$1,000 a month to access the service.

So, the question is, are you prepared to pay the price for your privacy?

## ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

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