



Snippets from Silicon Valley

Mark Curtis, Technology Law Alliance

Season's Greetings from Silicon Valley! There has been at least a little festive cheer over here in the USA. The unemployment rate in the USA dropped back to 8.6% from its level of 9.1% over the last few months. The so-called Black Friday shopping spree showed renewed buying activity by consumers and that seems to be continuing as we approach the Christmas season. There is some optimism that the Democrats and the Republicans are starting to work out some compromises, although they are still going backwards and forwards on negotiations to continue with an extension to the payroll tax cut and it's anyone's guess how that will pan out. The bigger problem remains the crisis in Europe and the potential knock on effect over here in the USA. The UK's veto of proposed Treaty changes caused much gloom about economic prospects. Bank stocks have tumbled again recently. It's going to continue to be a bumpy ride!

Here in Silicon Valley, a few weeks ago I attended a fascinating panel session organized by the Churchill Club, a not-for profit organization that seeks to "ignite conversations to encourage innovation and economic growth." The topic was "the Big Data effect". The session addressed the challenges and opportunities posed by the incredible surge in the proliferation and availability of data. The panelists included a variety of high ranking representatives from corporate, start-up, venture capitalist and educationalists from SAS, Greenplum, Factual, Accel and Walmart Labs. Key themes discussed by the panel and the audience included the need for everyone to seize the opportunity to capture, monitor, interrogate, manipulate and apply data more effectively. There were some interesting observations about how all communities have changed in the way that they utilize data. One recurring theme was about how data privacy concerns and data protection regulations might stifle innovation. The panel called for more standardized data protection approaches globally.

On the data protection theme, the latest draft version of the European Commission's proposal for a new General Data Protection Regulation has been made available. The draft version is open to review and discussion by the Commission and various interested parties will provide commentary. It's likely that the final proposal will be issued at the end of January 2012. The draft version calls for major changes that will lead to a much tougher data protection environment.

Here in the USA, some major web firms including Google, Facebook, Twitter and Yahoo have complained to the US government about a proposed bill to combat piracy. They are bemoaning the proposed Stop Online Piracy Act ("SOPA"), saying that it poses a threat to internet freedom. SOPA is supported by the film / music industry and would give powers to content providers to require internet service providers to remove infringing content and sites. In the UK, the Culture secretary Jeremy Hunt is said to be considering whether to introduce even stricter measures in the upcoming Communications Act which would target similar rogue websites, along the same lines as SOPA. Watch this space!

If you would like further details about any of the legal and regulatory developments in Europe, please contact us. In the meantime, as we say over here: Happy Holidays!

Email: mark.curtis@tlawa.co.uk

Mobile: (+1) 408 438 3467