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Sun on Privacy: 'Get Over It'

by [Polly Sprenger](#) [Polly Sprenger](#) Also by this reporter

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The chief executive officer of Sun Microsystems said Monday that consumer privacy issues are a "red herring."

"You have zero privacy anyway," Scott McNealy told a group of reporters and analysts Monday night at an event to launch his company's new Jini technology.

"Get over it."

McNealy's comments came only hours after competitor [Intel \(INTC\)](#) reversed course under pressure and disabled identification features in its forthcoming Pentium III chip.

Jodie Bernstein, director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection at the Federal Trade Commission, said that McNealy's remarks were out of line.

"Millions of American consumers tell us that privacy is a grave concern to them when they are thinking about shopping online," Bernstein said.

Sun Microsystems is a member of the [Online Privacy Alliance](#), an industry coalition that seeks to head off government regulation of online consumer privacy in favor of an industry self-regulation approach.

"It is a conundrum, because I know that [Sun is] a member of the Online Privacy Alliance, and they have spoken positively about

responding to consumer needs," Bernstein said. "This sounds very different than what we have generally been hearing from members of the alliance."

Privacy watchdogs echoed Bernstein's remarks.

"I'm astonished by Scott's remarks," said Jason Catlett, CEO of [Junkbusters](#), a company that makes privacy software. "I wonder if he heard what Intel decided yesterday? Intel obviously decided that privacy is such a hot spot that they changed plans they've had for months in a matter of hours."

Catlett said the comments are even more surprising in light of the fact that the undersecretary of commerce is currently in Europe to demonstrate to foreign governments that American companies are committed to security and privacy.

"David Aaron is in Europe now saying the United States has adequate privacy protection the same day the chief executive of one of the leading computer companies stands up and says 'you have no privacy,'" Catlett said.

"It's tantamount to a declaration of war."

McNealy made the remarks in response to a question about what privacy safeguards [Sun \(SUNW\)](#) would be considering for Jini. The technology is designed to allow various consumer devices to communicate and share processing resources with one another.

"I think Scott's comments were completely irresponsible and that Sun and Intel and many of these leaders are creating public policy every time they make a product decision," said Lori Fena, chairman of the board of the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#).

For consumers, McNealy's comments raised questions about Sun's commitment to privacy.

"One might hope that industry leaders such as McNealy would propose solutions to enhance citizen privacy rather than just telling them to 'get over it,'" said Linda Walsh, a consumer concerned about

electronic privacy.

"He may have no privacy because of his status as CEO. He shouldn't assume his reality is everyone else's," Walsh said.

In December, a New Hampshire consultant alleged that Sun [violated](#) its online privacy agreement and redistributed his personal information against his wishes.

Sun representatives could not be reached for comment.

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