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CANADIANS AND AMERICANS SUPPORT BIOMETRIC TECHNOLOGY IN PASSPORTS AND DRIVERS' LICENCES: SURVEY

But citizens of both countries are concerned about cost and government abuse

TORONTO, August 2, 2005 – On both sides of the border, support for including biometric identifiers in government-issued identification documents is high, though slightly higher in Canada, according to a new survey conducted by TNS, the world's largest custom market information company, and TRUSTe, the online privacy leader.

"Including biometric data such as fingerprints or retinal scans in ID documents are perceived by the public to help prevent fraud and identity theft, but, at the same time, many Canadians and Americans express privacy and cost concerns about government use of the technology," said David Stark, privacy officer of TNS.

The TNS/TRUSTe survey of Internet users in Canada and the U.S. — 1,157 Canadians and 1,003 Americans — found that citizens in both countries ranked the passport ahead of all other ID documents as the most appropriate one for the addition of biometric identifiers (85% support in Canada; 79% in the U.S.). Including biometric technology in drivers' licences, social insurance cards (social security cards in the U.S.) and provincial health insurance cards also registered high levels of support.

The Government of Canada plans to use facial recognition biometric technology in the Canadian passport and the U.S. Department of State is currently testing an electronic passport containing a computer chip with biometric information.

In June, the U.S. Congress approved the REAL ID Act, which will require state motor vehicle agencies to use a common machine-readable technology and other federal ID standards in drivers' licences by 2008. The new requirements will be established by the Department of Homeland Security and could include adding biometric information to drivers' licences.

The TNS/TRUSTe survey asked whether Canadians and Americans would support a brand new, national identity card issued to every citizen by their respective federal governments. Seven in ten Canadians (69%) say they would view such a card positively, two in ten would be opposed to it (22%) and one in ten are undecided. By contrast, just half of Americans would back a new national ID card, one-third would be against it and 17 per cent are undecided.

"Compared to their southern neighbours, Canadians tend to express slightly more support for including biometric information in government-issued documents and less support for private sector uses of biometric data," Stark said.

More than two-thirds of Americans and about six in ten Canadians think it would be a good idea to add biometric identifiers to credit cards and debit cards, the survey found. But this fairly high level of support does not extend to other types of cards issued by companies. Just 28 per cent of Americans and 18 per cent of Canadians favour adding their biometric data to retail store loyalty cards, for example.

More than eight in ten people in both countries think that fingerprinting is the most acceptable form of biometric identification followed by eye scans (supported by 67% of Canadians and 58% of Americans). Hand geometry, voice recognition and facial scans receive much less support.

In addition, Canadians and Americans were asked for their opinions on the potential consequences of biometric technology programs, including government misuse of the information and reliability of the technology. The most widely cited concern, mentioned by three-quarters of citizens in both countries, is the potentially high cost of implementing a biometric program.

People also believe there is a high potential for government to misuse the information, with six in ten holding this view, and an equal number believe that their personal privacy would be greatly reduced because the government would be able to track their movements.

Canadians tend to be slightly more upbeat than Americans are about the potential benefits of biometrics for national security. Nearly six in ten Canadians (58%) but only half of Americans (51%) think that the use of biometric technology in ID documents would make it harder for terrorists to operate in their respective countries.

“Biometric technology takes the collection of personal information to a whole new level. Organizations that use it must respect the public’s legitimate privacy and security concerns,” Stark added.

The TNS/TRUSTe survey was conducted online between March 17 and 25 in the U.S. and between May 26 and 30 in Canada. E-mail invitations were sent to nationally representative samples of the TNS NFO Internet panel in the U.S. and the TNS Canadian Facts Internet panel in Canada. Both TNS panels comprise hundreds of thousands of individuals who have agreed to participate in survey research from time to time. Over 1,000 interviews were completed in each country: 1,003 in the U.S and 1,157 in Canada. The survey results are representative of the online U.S. and Canadian adult populations and are considered accurate to within three percentage points (3.1 in the U.S. and 2.9 in Canada), 19 times out of 20.

More survey results are available on the TNS Canadian Facts Web site: www.tns-cf.com.

About TNS

TNS is a market information group. We are the world’s largest custom research company and a leading provider of social and political polling. We are also a major supplier of consumer panel, TV audience measurement and media intelligence services.

TNS operates a global network spanning 70 countries and employs over 13,000 people. We provide market information and measurement, together with insights and analysis, to local and multinational organizations.

We combine our specialist sector knowledge with expertise in the areas of new product development, motivational research, brand and advertising research and stakeholder management to bring our clients up-to-the minute, internationally consistent information.

We think differently to help our clients build competitive advantage, making TNS the sixth sense of business (www.tns-global.com).

About TRUSTe

TRUSTe, the online privacy leader, is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to enabling individuals and organizations to establish trusting relationships based on respect for personal identity and information in the evolving networked world.

Founded in 1997, TRUSTe runs an award-winning global privacy certification and seal program. Its seal programs are considered Safe Harbors for the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the EU Safe Harbor Framework. Today, TRUSTe maintains the largest privacy seal program with more than 1,400 Web sites certified throughout the world including AOL, Microsoft, IBM, Nationwide and *The New York Times*. TRUSTe's mission extends standards, certification and oversight into email with Bonded Sender. For more information on TRUSTe please visit www.truste.org.

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Media Contacts:

David Stark
Privacy Officer, North America, TNS
Public Affairs Director, TNS Canadian Facts
(416) 346-5434
david.stark@tns-cf.com

Richard Jenkins
Vice President and Corporate Director,
Public Opinion Research
(613) 230-4799
richard.jenkins@tns-cf.com

Cassandra Harris
GolinHarris for TNS
(212) 373-6029
charris@golinharris.com

Greg Wind
FitzGerald Communications for TRUSTe
(617) 585-2240
trust.e@fitzgerald.com