

Introduction

Stephan Landsman

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**INTRODUCTION: THE TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL
CLIFFORD SYMPOSIUM ON TORT LAW AND
SOCIAL POLICY: PRIVACY, DATA THEFT
AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY**

*Stephan Landsman**

Consumers today entrust more information to corporations than ever before. This information is assiduously collected, collated, analyzed, and stored in massive databases. It often includes the most sensitive financial, health, and personal material. Its value for licit and illicit activity is enormous. It can determine the opportunity to secure credit, purchase insurance, obtain medical treatment, or find a job. It can also facilitate the emptying of bank accounts and the ruining of businesses.

Despite the critical value of these data, and their potential in the wrong hands to do great harm, corporations have been remarkably inept at protecting consumer information from theft and misuse. In hundreds of millions of instances, consumers' private information has been stolen, opening the way for identity theft and other wrongdoing. When faced with consumers' complaints about such problems, the vast majority of courts have denied that they have the power or tools to act.

This year's Clifford Symposium focused on the question of data theft and corporate responsibility.

* Robert A. Clifford Professor of Tort Law and Social Policy, Emeritus; Visiting Professor of Law, Brooklyn Law School; A.B. Kenyon College; J.D. Harvard University.

