Earlier this year, the United States National Security Agency (NSA) published a document for the general public titled “The NSA Story”[[1]](#endnote-1). The publication came in response to public unrest in light of possibly the biggest intelligence leak in US history, when Edward Snowden exposed the NSA for mass surveillance in the name of the security of the United States of America.

The fact is that the NSA is far from being the only organization keeping tabs on the details of our lives. Much of our daily activity is recorded and some of it is even available for public viewing. Just for example, private companies that repossess cars use PlateScan technology to drive around and scan every license plate they pass and keep a record of its geographical location and the time it was scanned, with millions of scans on permanent record. They can even sell their databases to make more money from their records. These records however are not freely available for public viewing, and there are no faces involved.

.......Unlike Google Maps.

The image has recently been updated, but for at least several months when one would look at their “Street View” of my sister’s house, I could be seen walking from the house toward the street. Scary?

Fortunately I was recorded committing only a minor offense; they busted me cutting through the grass as a shortcut.

Without a doubt, in this age of information we are learning to be aware of the permanence of our actions. While most of us will likely be more skeptical about the truth of things that we read online, research shows that we are actually less likely to lie in an email than when speaking on the phone. “That’s not actually what I said” and “You’re taking things totally out of context” cannot be thrown around so easily when we are referring to written correspondence with an e-paper trail. Anyone associated with a given email can pull it up at any given time and see clearly in black and white pixels exactly what was written and what was not. Have you ever held your breath after pushing “Send”, unsure whether you just sent an email to a very wrong person?

The thought that our phone calls and text messages may be recorded, and we can realistically expect even to be surveilled walking out of the house and displayed for public viewing online, gives a whole new meaning to the warning “Watch your step”.

It is also a tangible expression of the fact that everything we do has a real, permanent outcome. Indeed everything we think and say contributes to the universe even though we may not be in tune with it. It may not be recorded by PlateScan, and Google Maps may not be displaying it online, but that doesn’t make it less real. Many positive words and actions actually help people in a measurable way, and even if they do not, the very fact that a positive action has been performed generates positivity.

Now, keeping in mind that positivity is not just abstract and fluffy, but it exists — even if it’s intangible, we have very good reason to “watch our step”. Not because Big Brother is watching, but because every step we take has an outcome. By measuring our steps to make sure that we capitalize on every opportunity to think, say, or do something positive, we help people directly, and we make an indelible beauty mark on the universe. And the NSA and Google Maps remind us, that we can never know just how far it will spread, who it will touch, or how much of an effect it will have.

1. <http://www.nsa.gov/public_info/_files/speeches_testimonies/2013_08_09_the_nsa_story.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)