

Interview with Steven Roberts, Vice-Chair of Compliance Institute's Data Protection & Information Security (DP&IS) Working Group and author of Data Protection for Business: Compliance, Governance, Reputation and Trust.



In this article we sat down with Steven Roberts, Vice-Chair of Compliance Institute's Data Protection & Information Security Working Group and author of *Data Protection for Business: Compliance, Governance, Reputation and Trust* to discuss his newly published book.

1. What inspired you to write *Data Protection for Business: Compliance, Governance, Reputation and Trust*?

There have been significant developments in data protection in recent years. The area has become more complex due to adjacent legislation introduced as part of the EU's Digital Decade policy programme. Alongside this, there is now a body of GDPR case law and a range of case study examples that provide practical guidance for Irish firms and their compliance teams.

Another inspiration was the rapid advancement and use of AI technologies, particularly since the introduction of ChatGPT and other Large Language Models (LLMs) in 2022. This presents particular data privacy challenges for businesses that I felt were important to cover.

2. How does this new book build on your earlier work published in 2021?

Data privacy has continued to develop and evolve over the past five years. For example, firms have a clearer understanding of the level of fines for their particular sector, there is a range of new guidelines from Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) and the European Data Protection Board (EDPB), and there is more clarity on the trajectory and focus of supervisory authorities' regulatory strategies. The new book is able to use this material to provide practical examples, case studies and guidance for companies. In that sense, it very much builds on the approach taken in my previous publication.

3. Can you share a key theme or insight from the book that you think will resonate most with compliance and data protection professionals?

Two themes throughout the book are a) the importance of training and b) the requirement to continually develop and iterate an organisation's approach to data protection. There are new guidelines emerging all the time from European supervisory authorities. Data privacy within a company cannot remain static; training and iterative improvement are some of the most important ways in which a robust data protection culture can be established. A company is only ever as compliant as its least trained member of staff; this is particularly relevant as organisations trial the use of new AI tools that process personal information.

4. Were there any surprising findings, case studies, or emerging trends that shaped the direction of the book?

The rapid pace of change in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has been one of the most substantive emerging trends. Companies have embraced the technology and are actively exploring how to achieve productivity and efficiency gains. In many organisations, a 'shadow culture' has also developed, whereby staff or business units are experimenting with technologies in an ad-hoc or unstructured way. This creates a range of data privacy concerns. The chapter on AI continued to grow month-on-month, to the point where it became the



largest within the book. The other key trend was the emergence of adjacent legislation and its interplay with the GDPR. This creates additional complexity and uncertainty for organisations.

5. From your perspective, what are the biggest data protection challenges facing Irish organisations in 2026?

The range of new legislation in adjacent areas such as AI and cybersecurity is creating a substantial compliance burden for organisations. This and ensuring the adoption of AI is implemented in a data privacy compliant manner will be two of the key challenges facing Irish organisations in 2026.

Organisations will also need to keep a close eye on Europe's Digital Omnibus; a package of proposed measures to ease the regulatory burden on European businesses. This has the potential to impact GDPR, the AI Act and other key EU legislation.

For companies trading outside the EU / EEA, the continued ripple effect of the GDPR means they have to take account of a range of new privacy legislation introduced globally.

6. How are new technologies (AI, automation, analytics, etc.) influencing the role of data protection and governance?

New technologies are creating a requirement for

an expanded skillset. For example, there is no one template or model as yet agreed as standard for the assessment of artificial intelligence systems. Data protection professionals will need to work with colleagues with specialisms in areas such as ethics and information technology to ensure they have a clear understanding of the potential risks these systems pose. This creates a particular challenge for smaller organisations who may not have access to these specialisms within the firm.

Businesses are also looking at how they can adapt existing mechanisms, such as Data Protection Impact Assessments, to effectively audit artificial intelligence systems. AI technology and the algorithms that underpin it are complex and lacking in the transparency that is a fundamental principle of GDPR.

7. What practical steps can organisations take to move from 'tick-box compliance' to a culture of trust and accountability?

There are many practical steps to effective compliance. Some key examples include:

- Regular training, particularly in fundamentals of the GDPR such as the six legal bases and the seven data protection principles. This should be put in place for new and existing staff.
- Undertaking a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for any new projects that

involve processing of personal data. This adheres to the GDPR requirement for data protection by design and default.

- Regularly auditing the company's data, to ensure the business has a clear understanding of the data it holds and processes.
- Having clear processes in place to deal with subject rights requests.
- Ensuring data protection is 'lead from the top' within the business. Staff at all levels of the organisation need to see that the senior leadership team takes data privacy compliance seriously.
- Keeping data protection top of mind. This can be as simple as having it as a standing item on meeting agendas.

Compliance professionals who regularly monitor the regulatory landscape and who commit to continuous professional development will be well placed to adapt and thrive in such an environment. Peter Drucker's concept of the 'knowledge worker' remains as apt as ever.

Businesses that support their compliance teams and broader staff, through opportunities to upskill alongside regular refresher training, will create an agile culture that can continue to respond effectively to the changes we are likely to witness over the next five years.

His new book, *Data Protection for Business: Compliance, Governance, Reputation and Trust* is published by Clarus Press.'

Compliance Institute members who wish to purchase a copy of the new book can avail of a discount on the Clarus Press website by using the code Datapro26.

8. What value do you believe the Compliance Institute and the CDPO designation bring to the profession in Ireland?

We are living through a time of significant change. The Compliance Institute provides a vital resource to compliance professionals and DPOs. To learn from their peers, to commit to continuous professional development, and to build an effective network as they progress through their careers. On a personal level, I have found the CDPO designation hugely helpful, whilst the output of the Institute's working groups is also very valuable.

9. What skills or competencies will data protection officers and compliance professionals need most over the next five years?

A learning mindset is critical. Data protection remains a fast-evolving area, with new legislation and guidance continuing to have an impact.

About the Author: Steven Roberts is Group Head of Marketing at Griffith College and Vice Chair of the Compliance Institute's Data Protection and Information Security Working Group. He is a Certified Data Protection Officer, Chartered Director and a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

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