Carnegie Mellon

# Computing Services
## Information Security Office

### Guidance on the Use of Gmail and DropBox

**March 7, 2011**

Due diligence should be performed when engaging cloud-based services like Gmail and DropBox due to a range of security and legal concerns.

With respect to Gmail, there are a number of security concerns related to both access controls and encryption. These concerns can be mitigated through good password management and security features like the "Always use https" setting. Often, however, it is up to the end user to properly engage these measures and experience shows that this does not always happen. There are also legal issues surrounding the use of Gmail, and other cloud-based email providers, including usage for business related communications. See the following resource where this is discussed briefly.

http://www.cmu.edu/iso/compliance/e-discovery/practice.html

Note that with appropriate contract terms and procedures in place, it may be possible that certain legal limitations and concerns might be overcome. Consult the Office of General Counsel for additional details.

Computing Services Information Security Office (ISO) recently conducted an informal security review of DropBox. Among other issues were concerns with DropBox's data encryption model, their ability to decrypt CMU data, the ease with which data could be inadvertently shared, and the lack of functionality to fully recover from inadvertent sharing. Secure user practices can mitigate these risks, but caution is advised, particularly when it comes to private or restricted information.

There are also license concerns related to DropBox. For example, the license agreement requires indemnification, which Carnegie Mellon typically finds unacceptable. Contact the University Contracts Office for more information on terms and conditions and license agreement issues.

The ISO has published a framework for safeguarding institutional information that should be closely evaluated when considering such services. At this time, neither DropBox nor Gmail services have been fully evaluated against this framework but the specified controls should be enforced regardless of service provider.

http://www.cmu.edu/iso/governance/guidelines/data-protection/index.html

For additional information and discussion, contact your local IT administrator(s) or the ISO at iso@andrew.cmu.edu.