



I Sent My DNA to a Tracking Company: Here's What Happened

Description

Kate Lake

Kate Lake seeks clarity regarding the fate of her financial and personal data.

The sudden cessation of operations by a DNA-testing company has left its users in a state of uncertainty, particularly concerning the sensitive data they entrusted to it. The London-based Atlas Biomed specialized in providing genetic insights, including susceptibility to various health conditions.

However, customers have found themselves locked out of their personalized reports, and the firm has not acknowledged any inquiries from the media. Users describe the scenario as “extremely concerning,” expressing a pressing desire for clarity on the whereabouts of their private information.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has indicated that it is looking into complaints regarding Atlas Biomed, emphasizing that individuals have the right to expect secure and responsible handling of their personal information.

Experts have noted that this situation highlights the precarious position of consumers who utilize DNA-analysis services, underlining the vulnerability of their personal data in the hands of such companies.

The Vanishing DNA Reports

Lisa Topping from Saffron Walden submitted a saliva sample to Atlas Biomed years ago, investing approximately £100 for an individualized genetic analysis. This analysis purported to inform her of her DNA composition and disease predispositions based on a questionnaire she completed.

After being able to periodically check her report online, she was alarmed to find that the website had vanished without explanation. Attempts to reach customer service yielded no response.

“The data is deeply personal; I am uncomfortable with their sudden disappearance,” Topping remarked.

Similarly, Kate Lake from Tonbridge paid £139 for a promised report that never materialized. Despite assurances of a refund, further communication ceased.

Lake described the situation as “disconcerting,” wondering about the fate of her information. The BBC's efforts to contact Atlas Biomed were unfruitful, as listed phone numbers were inactive, and visits to their London offices revealed no signs of activity.

Even social media platforms showed little recent activity from the company, with numerous users expressing their frustrations online.



Facebook

Customers have voiced their concerns on the company's Facebook platform.

Mystery of Connections to Russia

Atlas Biomed's sudden disappearance raises intriguing questions, particularly regarding its purported links to Russia. Officially recorded as an active entity with Companies House, it has not submitted financial statements since December 2022.

Despite having eight appointed officers, four have already resigned, while two remaining officers share an address in Moscow, which is also noted for a Russian billionaire who previously held director status.

Registering near London's tech hub, Silicon Roundabout, the BBC noted that a registration firm at the address confirmed Atlas Biomed's presence, albeit with no actual office activity detected during their visit.

The London office associated with Atlas Biomed's registration.

An email from the registration firm indicated that they could not facilitate communication with Atlas Biomed "for security reasons." The firm strongly encouraged direct contact.

Despite multiple outreach attempts, Atlas Biomed has remained unresponsive to the BBC's inquiries.

Cybersecurity expert Prof. Alan Woodward remarked on the peculiar connection to Russia, suggesting that if clients were aware of the company's operational history, they might hesitate to entrust their DNA data.

At the Mercy of Corporations

Currently, the fate of Atlas Biomed's customer DNA database remains unresolved, though the BBC has not uncovered any evidence of misuse. However, Prof. Carissa Veliz, author of **Privacy is Power**, asserts that DNA is arguably the most precious form of personal information one possesses. It is irrevocable and reveals significant biological information about oneself and one's family.

In the UK, biometric data is protected under GDPR legislation, emphasizing that when individuals share their data, they place themselves entirely at the mercy of the company, necessitating a critical level of trust.

"We should not have to wait for an incident before demanding accountability from these organizations," Prof. Veliz stated.

Additional reporting by Graham Fraser

CATEGORY

1. Sci/Tech - LEVEL5



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