

Some recent government actions related to privacy

The Associated Press

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March 30, 2011: The Federal Trade Commission announces a settlement with Google. The search-engine and advertising company agrees to adopt a comprehensive privacy program to settle federal charges that it deceived users and violated its own privacy policy when it launched a social-networking service called Buzz. The settlement mandates independent audits to oversee and verify Google's privacy program every other year for the next 20 years. The settlement also requires Google to obtain user consent before sharing consumer information with third parties if it alters a service to use the data in a way that would violate its existing privacy policy.

Nov. 29: The FTC announces settlement with Facebook. The social-networking site agrees to submit to government audits of its privacy practices every other year for the next two decades. The company commits to getting explicit approval from its users — a process known as "opting in" — before changing their privacy controls.

Feb. 16, 2012: The FTC issues a report complaining that software companies producing games and other mobile applications aren't telling parents what personal information is being collected from kids and how companies are using it. It says apps could quietly be collecting a child's location, phone number, call logs and lists of friends.

Feb. 22: California announces a crackdown on nosy mobile applications, telling them they must give people advance warning if they want to keep pulling sensitive information from smartphones and tablet computers. Leading companies in mobile services, including Google, Apple and Microsoft, agree to require mobile apps seeking to collect personal information to forewarn users by displaying privacy policies before their services are installed on a device.

Feb. 23: The Obama administration calls for stronger privacy protections for consumers as mobile gadgets, Internet services and other tools are able to do a better job of tracking what you do and where you go. The administration issues a report in which it outlines a proposed "Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights" and urges technology companies, consumer groups and others to jointly craft new protections. Such guidelines will initially be voluntary for companies, but those that agree to abide by them could be subject to FTC sanctions for any violations.

April 13: The Federal Communications Commission fines Google \$25,000, saying the online search leader "deliberately impeded and delayed" an investigation into how it collected data while taking photos for its "Street View" mapping feature. The FCC

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also says it will not take action against Google over its data collection. Part of the reason for that is that it still has "significant factual questions" about the Street View project that haven't been answered.

Thursday: Google disputes the FCC's characterization of the probe and says the FCC was the party that took its time. Google argues that the 17-month inquiry would have gone much more quickly if the FCC hadn't dawdled so much. In some instances, Google says the FCC took seven to 12 weeks to respond to information that the company had submitted. Google says it accepted the fine to close the case.

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