Myspace settles privacy probe with FTC

The Associated Press

Myspace, the once-mighty social network ultimately toppled by Facebook, settled a privacy investigation by the Federal Trade Commission and agreed to submit to privacy audits over the next 20 years.

The settlement, over charges that Myspace misrepresented its privacy policies to users, is similar to deals the FTC struck previously with Facebook Inc. and Google Inc.

The FTC said Tuesday that despite telling users it would not share personally identifiable information with others, Myspace gave advertisers users' "Friend ID" numbers. That allowed advertisers to find users' publicly available personal information, often including full names, and could even lead advertisers to discover users' web-browsing activity.

In the settlement, Myspace agreed not to misrepresent its privacy policies. It also agreed to implement a comprehensive privacy program and to submit to regular, independent privacy assessments for two decades.

Myspace, launched in 2003, was a popular Internet destination for years. But the social network was beaten by Facebook.

News Corp., which had bought Myspace for $580 million in 2005, sold it to Specific Media last year for $35 million. Specific Media, based in Irvine, California, is an online ad network operator.

In a statement, Specific Media said it settled to "put any questions regarding Myspace's pre-acquisition advertising practices behind us." It said it had conducted a thorough review of Myspace's advertising practices and privacy safeguards following the acquisition and had "successfully improved upon Myspace's historical practices, bringing the social media platform to the forefront of industry best practice for ad delivery."

In March 2011, the FTC settled with Google over charges that it deceived users and violated its own privacy policy when it launched a social-networking service called Buzz. The settlement 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.

In November, the FTC reached a settlement with Facebook. The company committed to getting explicit approval from its users — a process known as "opting in" — before changing their privacy controls.

Both settlements, like that with Myspace, called for independent audits every other

year for 20 years.

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