

What you should know about the new Google Privacy Policy

Written by Jacqueline Lawson
Sunday, 05 February 2012 00:00



Google announced changes to its privacy policies that will allow the web giant to merge user data collected across multiple services, an update that promises to renew scrutiny over Google's privacy practices.

The new privacy policies go into effect on March 1. Users have no choice but to accept the changes, except, of course, to stop using Google's services.

The initiative could be of particular significance for consumers of Android devices, who are almost always signed on to their phones and tablets, experts said. Without signing up for an account, an Android smartphone owner would be limited in what he or she could do on the device, they said.

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“I guess it’s theoretically possible to use an Android device without being logged on, but that wouldn’t be much of a smartphone,” said Kurt Opsahl, a senior staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a group that advocates for free speech and privacy online.

The company said users who activate Android phones without signing into a Google account can make phone calls, browse the Web and use pre-installed applications. But they couldn’t use their Gmail, chat functions or download Angry Birds, Pandora or other applications from the Android Marketplace.

Google collects information in several ways:

Information you give us. For example, many of our services require you to sign up for a Google Account. When you do, we’ll ask for personal information, like your name, email address, telephone number or credit card. If you want to take full advantage of the sharing features we offer, we might also ask you to create a publicly visible Google Profile, which may include your name and photo.

Information we get from your use of our services. We may collect information about the services that you use and how you use them, like when you visit a website that uses our

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advertising services or you view and interact with our ads and content. This information includes:

Device information

We may collect device-specific information (such as your hardware model, operating system version, unique device identifiers, and mobile network information including phone number). Google may associate your device identifiers or phone number with your Google Account.

Log information

When you use our services or view content provided by Google, we may automatically collect and store certain information in server logs. This may include:

details of how you used our service, such as your search queries.

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telephony log information like your phone number, calling-party number, forwarding numbers, time and date of calls, duration of calls, SMS routing information and types of calls.

Internet protocol address.

device event information such as crashes, system activity, hardware settings, browser type, browser language, the date and time of your request and referral URL.

cookies that may uniquely identify your browser or your Google Account.

Location information

When you use a location-enabled Google service, we may collect and process information about your actual location, like GPS signals sent by a mobile device. We may also use various technologies to determine location, such as sensor data from your device that may, for example, provide information on nearby Wi-Fi access points and cell towers.

Unique application numbers

Certain services include a unique application number. This number and information about your installation (for example, the operating system type and application version number) may be sent to Google when you install or uninstall that service or when that service periodically contacts our servers, such as for automatic updates.

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Local storage

We may collect and store information (including personal information) locally on your device using mechanisms such as browser web storage (including HTML 5) and application data caches.

Cookies and anonymous identifiers

We use various technologies to collect and store information when you visit a Google service, and this may include sending one or more cookies or anonymous identifiers to your device. We also use cookies and anonymous identifiers when you interact with services we offer to our partners, such as advertising services or Google features that may appear on other sites.

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