

Apple Admits That iPhones Listen In On Users Using iPhone Apps

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by Tyler Durden

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In the [aftermath of numerous reports](#) that Amazon's Alexa speakers were "accidentally" listening in, and in some cases recording the conversations of their owners, on Tuesday Apple responded to US lawmakers whether its iPhones invade users' privacy and listen in on conversation without their consent: Apple's response: a resounding "no", and added that it does not allow third-party apps to do so either, after lawmakers asked the company if its devices were invading users' privacy.

Representatives Greg Walden, Marsha Blackburn, Gregg Harper and Robert Latta wrote to Apple's chief executive Tim Cook and Alphabet chief executive Larry Page in July, citing concerns about **reports that smartphones could "collect 'non-triggered' audio data from users'**

conversations near a smartphone in order to hear a 'trigger' phrase, such as 'Okay Google' or 'Hey Siri.'"

In a letter to Walden, an Oregon Republican who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Apple said iPhones do not record audio while listening for Siri wakeup commands and that Siri does not share spoken words. Apple also vowed that it requires users to explicitly approve microphone access and that apps must display a clear signal that they are listening, which of course .

*"We believe privacy is a fundamental human right and purposely design our products and services to minimize our collection of customer data," Apple executive Timothy Powderly wrote in the letter to Walden. **"The customer is not our product, and our business model does not depend on collecting vast amounts of personally identifiable information to enrich targeted profiles marketed to advertisers."***

Which is great for Apple, because virtually every other social media's business model depends on precisely that.

The letters, in which lawmakers cited reports suggesting **third-party applications had access to and used 'non-triggered' data without users' knowledge**, followed congressional hearings in April into Facebook Inc's privacy practices, which included testimony by its CEO Mark Zuckerberg, [Reuters reported](#). Apple declined to comment beyond its letter, which was seen by Reuters.

Apple also wrote that it had removed apps from its App Store over privacy violations but declined to say whether it had ever banned a developer. **It also said it was up to developers to notify users when an app was removed for privacy reasons,** an obligation which we are "confident" they all strictly follow.

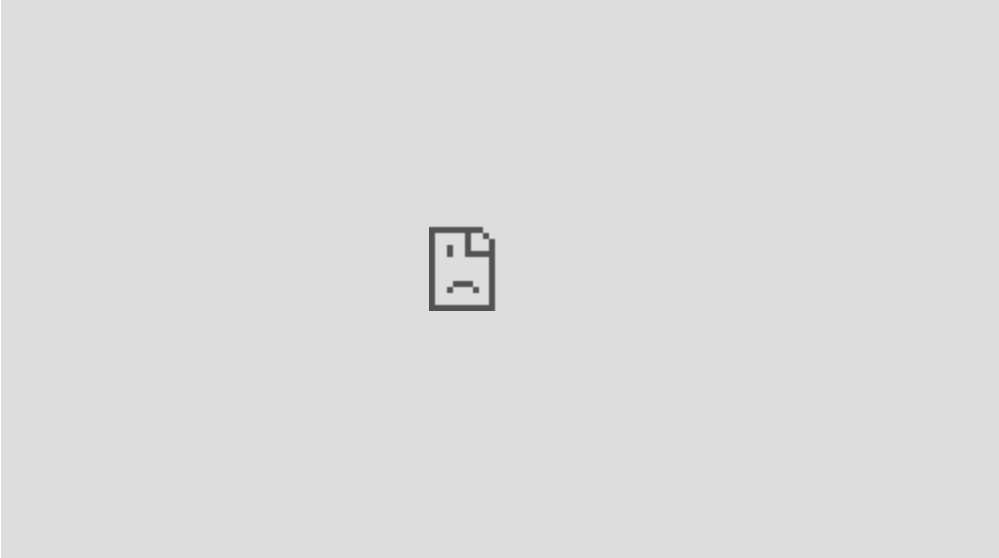
Or maybe not, because as even Apple admitted, it's really up to the developer to be honest with the user.

"Apple does not and cannot monitor what developers do with the customer data they have collected, or prevent the onward transfer of that data, nor do we have the ability to ensure a developer's compliance with their own privacy policies or local law," Apple wrote.

In other words, sellers of apps for the iPhone, a business that has generated \$100 billion in revenue for developers over the past decade, and tens of billions for Apple, can do anything they want. And while Apple affirmed that it removed apps from the App Store over privacy violations, **it declined to say whether it ever banned any developers.**

Furthermore, for some reason lawmakers only focused on smartphones, even though they should widen their scope to encompass smart speakers. After all, there's one huge elephant in the room that's missing in here. That's Amazon, which doesn't make any smartphones of its own, but whose Alexa assistant is the best-sold voice assistant for home. And we all remember how, only a few months ago, some Echo speaker users discovered their devices recorded a piece of their conversation and then sent that audio file to a contact. All that happened without the explicit consent of the users.

And as a reminder, here is the shocked response from one Amazon Echo user who [found that her conversations](#) were anything but private.



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