

Apple Struggles to Reassure Feds As Apple iPhones Are Found To Be Spying on People



BY PHIL BAKER

CHAT 41 COMMENTS

Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide marketing, shows the new iPhone 8 at the Steve Jobs Theater on the new Apple campus on Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2017, in Cupertino, Calif. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)



The Energy and Commerce Committee in Congress sent [letters](#) in July to Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, and Larry Page, CEO of Google's parent company Alphabet, asking whether their smartphones listen to their users and collect data. In its response, Apple said that they do not listen to what users say and that third-party apps cannot access the audio data without permission.

Timothy Powderly, Apple's director of federal government affairs, claimed [in a letter obtained by CNN](#), "The iPhone doesn't listen to consumers except to recognize the clear, unambiguous audio trigger 'Hey Siri.' 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."

"We believe privacy is a fundamental human right and purposely design our products and services to minimize our collection of customer data," Powderly added.

Facebook Brazenly Asks Banks for Customer Bank Balances, Credit Card Numbers

There's been no word yet if Google has responded.

The questions were raised by lawmakers in response to rumors that some companies, including Amazon, Facebook, and others collect data from our conversations.

Apple explained that an iPhone will display a visual alert when Siri is listening to a user's request. Apple also requires third-party apps to display an indicator when they're capturing data using the microphone, and users must first grant access to the app to access the mic. This ostensibly refers to apps that are used to make recordings and use voice search.

This latest news comes on the heels of a new report that accuses Google of tracking a user's locations without permission. The Associated Press [discovered](#) that Google captures and saves your location history even if you've disabled location tracking on your phone.

What's becoming evident is that many high-tech companies, particularly those dependent on advertising, have few ethical boundaries in their efforts to capture more and more of our personal information. Consider that these companies have thousands of engineers being paid to come up with new ideas to make their companies' product more effective and to grow the revenue.

Imagine a Google engineer who has access to your location and your microphone. He or she could decide to develop the capability to listen to you every time you visit your doctor to learn about your health and sell it to insurance companies. This is hypothetical and there's no indication it's being done, but all the tools are there right on your phone to do so.

What's really needed is a code of conduct that defines their limits, whether it's something developed internally or by a government agency. So far few companies have provided any signs of doing this on their own. Apple may be the exception because their business model is built around the profits from their hardware, not from advertising revenue.

Police and the Feds Can Now Unlock Your iPhone without Apple's Help