

Google employees are concerned about data privacy, court documents reveal

Article

The news: Documents revealed as part of a class-action lawsuit suggest that even **Google** employees don't know the scope of data the company collects from users, but allege that the

search giant does not prioritize user privacy, [per](#) MarketWatch.

Tell it to the judge: The 2020 lawsuit alleges that Google's **Chrome** violated its privacy policy regarding how much information users must provide to the browser.

- Interviews with current and former Google employees were conducted by an internal team (the **Privacy and Data Protection Office**) that focused on Google's data privacy. They suggest that practices around data collection are opaque and privacy was not a priority for executives.
- One employee had “no idea what information Google has on me,” and said that Google “can't explain” what info it has on users. Another said that “Consent is no longer consent if you think of ads as a product,” while another shared that “users have a right to know.”
- The ongoing suit isn't the only privacy litigation the search giant is dealing with. Last week, **Google reached a \$392 million settlement in a tracking data lawsuit with 40 states** for allegedly continuing to collect user location history [years after they opted out of tracking](#).

The privacy issue: Google isn't alone—regulators in the US and Europe have made privacy a key element of Big Tech and advertising regulation. Even non-giants are affected: The FTC recently sued ad tech firm **Kochava** over its data privacy practices in a warning shot to the entire digital ad industry.

- Google's privacy moves have been mixed. While it's pushed privacy in its branding and has highlighted clean room initiatives, recent lawsuits have been generated over what goes on behind closed doors. Its own public moves, like [muddying privacy disclosures](#) on its app store, also give cause for scrutiny.
- The **Interactive Advertising Bureau** named regulation as the [greatest threat](#) to [advertising signal loss](#), which is already mired by issues like Chrome's own phasing out of third-party cookies. Google makes the overwhelming majority of its revenues—about 82% in 2021—from advertising. Any significant change to its data collection practices will affect those figures, and it's already [caved to regulator pressure](#) over its ad dominance elsewhere.
- Google isn't the only company accused of using data privacy workarounds. **Meta** was recently sued for using its [in-app browsers](#) on **Instagram** and **Facebook** to gather data on users who used **AppTrackingTransparency** to opt-out of tracking.

Our take: The Google interviews suggest that data collection at Google is broader than many employees can keep up with, and that company practices are unclear.

- As the industry leader for digital advertising—it will make **\$71.73 billion** in US ad revenues this year—Google will be a target for regulators looking to set new standards around data privacy. For every discrepancy revealed, penalties could become harsher.

Digital Ad Revenues, by Company

US, 2022, billions

Amazon



Apple



Google



Meta*



Microsoft



TikTok



YouTube



*Note: includes advertising that appears on desktop and laptop computers as well as mobile phones, tablets, and other internet-connected devices, and includes all the various formats of advertising on those platforms; net ad revenues after companies pay traffic acquisition costs (TAC) to partner sites; *includes Instagram advertising revenues; **data for 2016-2021 is included under ad revenue for Microsoft; ***excludes non-advertising revenues (e.g. Reddit Premium, Reddit Coins); ****includes ad revenues for AOL and Millennial Media; Yahoo data for 2017-2019 is included under ad revenue for Verizon Media Group*

Source: eMarketer, October 2022

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com