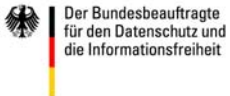


April 19, 2010



Google Inc.

Dear

Google is an innovative company that has changed how people around the world use the Internet. We recognize your company's many accomplishments and its dramatic impact on our information economy. As data protection regulators mandated to protect privacy rights, we also applaud your participation in discussions in many jurisdictions about new approaches to data protection.

However, we are increasingly concerned that, too often, the privacy rights of the world's citizens are being forgotten as Google rolls out new technological applications. We were disturbed by your recent rollout of the Google Buzz social networking application, which betrayed a disappointing disregard for fundamental privacy norms and laws. Moreover, this was not the first time you have failed to take adequate account of privacy considerations when launching new services.

The privacy problems associated with your initial global rollout of Google Buzz on February 9, 2010 were serious and ought to have been readily apparent to you.

In essence, you took Google Mail (Gmail), a private, one-to-one web-based e-mail service, and converted it into a social networking service, raising concern among users that their personal information was being disclosed. Google automatically assigned users a network of "followers" from among people with whom they corresponded most often on Gmail, without adequately informing Gmail users about how this new service would work or providing sufficient information to permit informed consent decisions. This violated the fundamental principle that individuals should be able to control the use of their personal information.

Users instantly recognized the threat to their privacy and the security of their personal information, and were understandably outraged. To your credit, Google apologized and moved quickly to stem the damage.

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While your company addressed the most privacy-intrusive aspects of Google Buzz in the wake of this public protest and most recently (April 5, 2010) you asked all users to reconfirm their privacy settings, we remain extremely concerned about how a product with such significant privacy issues was launched in the first place. We would have expected a company of your stature to set a better example. Launching a product in “beta” form is not a substitute for ensuring that new services comply with fair information principles *before* they are introduced.

It is unacceptable to roll out a product that unilaterally renders personal information public, with the intention of repairing problems later as they arise. Privacy cannot be sidelined in the rush to introduce new technologies to online audiences around the world.

Unfortunately, Google Buzz is not an isolated case. Google Street View was launched in some countries without due consideration of privacy and data protection laws and cultural norms. In that instance, you addressed privacy concerns related to such matters as the retention of unblurred facial images only after the fact, and there is continued concern about the adequacy of the information you provide before the images are captured.

We recognize that Google is not the only online company with a history of introducing services without due regard for the privacy of its users. As a leader in the online world, we hope that your company will set an example for others to follow.

We therefore call on you, like all organisations entrusted with people’s personal information, to incorporate fundamental privacy principles directly into the design of new online services. That means, at a minimum:

- collecting and processing only the minimum amount of personal information necessary to achieve the identified purpose of the product or service;
- providing clear and unambiguous information about how personal information will be used to allow users to provide informed consent;
- creating privacy-protective default settings;
- ensuring that privacy control settings are prominent and easy to use;
- ensuring that all personal data is adequately protected, and
- giving people simple procedures for deleting their accounts and honouring their requests in a timely way.

In addition to respecting these broad principles, we also expect all organisations to comply with relevant data protection and privacy laws. These laws apply online, just as they do in the physical world. As well, we encourage organisations to engage with data protection authorities when developing services with significant implications for privacy.

As your users made clear to you in the hours and days after the launch of Google Buzz, privacy is a fundamental right that people value deeply. As regulators responsible for promoting and overseeing compliance with data protection and privacy laws, we hope that you will learn from this experience as you design and develop new products and services.

We would like to receive a response indicating how Google will ensure that privacy and data protection requirements are met before the launch of future products.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Jennifer Stoddart
Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Original signed by

Alex Türk
Chairman, Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (France)

Original signed by

Peter Schaar
Commissioner, Bundesbeauftragte für den Datenschutz und die Informationsfreiheit (Germany)

Original signed by

Billy Hawkes
Data Protection Commissioner of Ireland

Original signed by

Yoram Hacoheh
Head of the Israeli Law, Information and Technology Authority

Original signed by

Francesco Pizzetti
Garante per la protezione dei dati personali (Italy)

Original signed by

Jacob Kohnstamm
Chairman, College Bescherming Persoonsgegevens (Netherlands)
Chairman, Article 29 Working Party

Original signed by

Marie Shroff
Privacy Commissioner, New Zealand

Original signed by

Artemi Rallo Lombarte
Director, Agencia Española de Protección de Datos (Spain)

Original signed by

Christopher Graham
Information Commissioner and Chief Executive (United Kingdom)