

Pandora subpoenaed in information-sharing inquiry

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A man displays an iPhone in 2009. Internet radio service Pandora said Monday that it has been asked for information by a US grand jury evidently looking into how smartphone applications tap into people's data.

Online radio service Pandora has received a subpoena from a federal grand jury investigating whether popular smartphone applications share information about their users with advertisers and other third parties.

Pandora says it believes it is one of many companies to receive subpoenas in a probe into the information-sharing practices of publishers that make apps for the iPhone and other Apple Inc. devices, as well as smartphones that run on Google Inc.'s Android operating system.

Pandora says it shares information with third parties to help it track how users interact with the service and to deliver targeted advertising. But the

Oakland, Calif.-based company says it is "not a specific target" of the grand jury investigation.

The company noted the development in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission detailing plans for an initial public offering. Pandora declined to comment or provide additional information about the probe.

The disclosure comes at a time of mounting concern about Internet privacy in Washington and growing unease about the vast amounts of personal information that companies are scooping up online - from Web browsing habits to smartphone locations to Facebook preferences - and then mining to target advertising.

The Commerce Department has called for the creation of a "privacy bill of rights" for Internet users to set ground rules for companies that collect consumer data online and use that information for marketing and other purposes.

The Federal Trade Commission has proposed the creation of a "Do Not Track" tool to let consumers stop or restrict advertisers from studying their online behavior in order to target ads. The tool would most likely take the form of a Web browser setting that travels with a user from site to site and informs websites when tracking is off limits.

In its filing, Pandora said that a government Do Not Track mandate "could significantly hinder our ability to collect and use data relating to listeners."

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