

US lawmakers query smartphone 'apps' in privacy

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Alan Davidson, director of US public policy of the Americas at Google Inc., testifies on Capitol Hill in 2010. Apple, Facebook, and Google on Thursday fielded questions from US lawmakers concerned that smartphones and popular mobile "apps" were putting people's privacy at risk.

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"I think online privacy is a basic American right and the companies that produce apps have to be regulated," Senator Jay Rockefeller said at the opening of a hearing on consumer privacy and protection in the mobile marketplace.

"With this new innovation comes gigantic risk."

Members of the Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Insurance Subcommittee questioned a panel that included Facebook chief technology officer Bret Taylor; Apple vice president of worldwide government affairs Catherine Novelli, and Google's US director of public policy Alan Davidson.

"We need companies like [Google](#), Apple, and Facebook to join [eBay](#), Microsoft and HP (Hewlett-Packard) that have come down on the side of common sense privacy protections," said Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts.

"I reject the notion that privacy protection is the enemy of innovation," he continued. "People should know when they are being tracked, why, for how long, and what is done with that information."

Apple, Google, and [Facebook](#) were adamant about their devotion to protecting people's privacy whether on computers, smartphones, tablets or other Internet-linked devices.

"Mobile services create enormous social and economic benefits, but they will not be used and will not succeed without [consumer trust](#)," Davidson said at the hearing. "We focus on privacy protection throughout the life of our products."

Novelli and Davidson held firm that location-sensing capabilities in smartphones backed by their respective companies are not used to track people and can be turned off by users who don't want enhanced services.

"Apple does not track user location and does not intend to do so," Novelli said.

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