

Siri's abortion info flap: Blame it on Beta, says Apple

December 1 2011, by Nancy Owano



Siri is the intelligent iPhone personal assistant smart enough to give you an answer just by asking—unless your question is where to find the closest abortion clinic. In a fast and furious go-round this week, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), abortion rights supporters, bloggers, and Apple itself traded notes about Siri's inability to provide an answer to questions about where to go for birth control and abortion.

Jenna Wortham in *The New York Times* brought this odd blank on the part of Siri to attention on Tuesday.

“Try asking it to find a local abortion clinic, and the software turns up a puzzling blank — even in areas that clearly have such clinics,” she said. When Siri was asked to find an abortion clinic in New York City, Siri replied, Sorry, I couldn’t find any abortion clinics.”

Megan Carpentier, the executive editor of *The Raw Story*, found that Siri users in the Washington, D.C., area were directed to antiabortion centers in Virginia and Pennsylvania instead of at a nearby Planned Parenthood. “Ask Google the same question, and you’ll get ads for no less than seven metro-area abortion clinics, two CPCs and a nationwide abortion referral service,” she wrote.

“Apple's Latest iPhone Has No Problem Pointing Users to Viagra, But Comes Up Blank on Birth Control, Abortion,” headlined a bothered ACLU on its blog “Blog of Rights,” and asked all of its readers to send a template-provided email message to Apple to voice concern. “Send a message to Apple: Fix Siri.”

The text message read “I urge you to correct this glitch, so Siri provides the same service to women seeking information about vital reproductive health care services as to users seeking Viagra, burgers, and other services.”

What also annoyed the ACLU is that, when Siri did provide replies for abortion queries, Siri directed questioners to pregnancy crisis centers. “These centers often bill themselves as resources for abortion care, but do not provide or refer for abortion and are notorious for providing false and misleading information about abortion to women,” said the ACLU.

To be fair to Apple, Siri’s co founder, Norman Winarsky--Siri was bought by Apple last year—pointed out that the inability of Siri to answer these kinds of question may be due to the third-third-party Web services that Siri uses, rather than a deliberate policy decision by Apple

to withhold abortion clinic information.

Since the Web services provide local business information, he said, it may be possible Apple was not aware of all the results that come up.

Fundamentally, Apple's response has been Blame it on Beta.

In response to *The New York Times* flap about Siri being clueless, Apple said Siri's cluelessness was not intentional. Natalie Kerris, spokesperson for Apple, said, "These are not intentional omissions meant to offend anyone. It simply means that as we bring Siri from beta to a final product, we find places where we can do better, and we will in the coming weeks."

Meantime, Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, sent a letter to the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, expressing concern about Siri: "It is disappointing to read that a tool like Siri is missing the mark when it comes to providing information about such personal health issues as abortion care and contraception."

More information: [www.rawstory.com/rs/2011/11/29 ... tead-of-an-abortion/](http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2011/11/29...tead-of-an-abortion/)
[www.prochoiceamerica.org/media ... pr11302011_siri.html](http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/media...pr11302011_siri.html)
[bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11 ... nswers-are-a-glitch/](http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11...nswers-are-a-glitch/)
[secure.aclu.org/site/SPageServ ... 11130_apple_abortion](http://secure.aclu.org/site/SPageServ...11130_apple_abortion)

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