

Privacy, technology face off again

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The tension between new technology and individual privacy is as old as Silicon Valley. Each advance that allows or impels us to share information or seek windows into others' lives is scary at first. Often the fears blow over as benefits become clear - but there will be limits to the degree that privacy and civil liberties will be given up, and individuals should have a right to make the choice for themselves.

The latest frontier is facial recognition technology, which tech companies such as Facebook hope will help ramp up profits. And well they should - as long as users' participation is an option.

Facebook announced Friday that it would switch off its facial recognition feature in Europe by Oct. 15, and it is deleting facial recognition data it has compiled there. Countries including Germany expressed concerns that Facebook was breaking European [privacy laws](#).

A [Facebook](#) spokesman told the [Los Angeles Times](#) that the company is committed to "best practice in data protection compliance." But it's clear that not all European users were aware of how or even whether their data was being collected and used.

Millions of people are willing to share practically every detail of their [private lives](#) with their online friends and family, if not the entire world. Others find that stunning. Some would love it if a company took their picture as they walked into a store, used facial recognition technology to identify them and then instantly offered them store discounts through their [smart phones](#), based on their buying habits. Others abhor the

thought that businesses and individuals have the ability to stalk their every move.

The most worrisome aspect of facial recognition technology isn't personal or business use, in our view. It's the potential for government to use cameras and satellites to track citizens' whereabouts.

At a Senate hearing in July, Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., expressed concern that the federal government could use facial recognition technology to identify and potentially jail peaceful protesters.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has reportedly compiled a database of more than 13 million photographs of criminals. It isn't far-fetched to envision an FBI has a database with the photo of every American so each could be tracked at will.

The Federal Trade Commission has promised to issue a best practices guide this year for companies using facial recognition technology. It should include the ability for Americans to opt out of the feature.

And Congress should be writing law to protect individuals' privacy. Law enforcement agencies have accepted limitations on the use of wiretaps and GPS information. Individuals should have the same reasonable protections against abuse of [facial recognition technology](#).

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