

# US probes mobile apps for data collection on kids (Update)

December 10 2012

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The Federal Trade Commission said its latest review of mobile apps

available on Apple's App Store and Google Play found that many collect personal data, and often share this with developers or marketers without disclosing this fact to parents.

"Our study shows that kids' apps siphon an alarming amount of information from mobile devices without disclosing this fact to parents," said FTC chairman Jon Leibowitz.

"All of the companies in the mobile app space, especially the gatekeepers of the app stores, need to do a better job. We'll do another survey in the future and we will expect to see improvement."

An FTC statement said the agency "is launching non-public investigations to determine whether certain entities in the mobile app marketplace are violating the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act or engaging in unfair or deceptive practices in violation of the Federal Trade Commission Act."

Jessica Rich, the FTC's deputy enforcement chief, declined to provide details on the apps which might be targeted, but said that "if they violated the laws, we would bring an enforcement action."

She said the agency was not identifying specific apps but hopes the developers and marketplaces can step up privacy protections.

"We're not naming names in part because we think this is a systematic problem," she said. "We don't want people to think if they avoid certain apps they are home free."

Rich said most apps studied by the FTC "made no privacy disclosures at all" and that those which did so "failed to make available the critical information that parents need."

Of particular concern, she said, was that apps were collecting and sharing data which could allow personal identification of children using mobile device, track their location or provide the phone numbers to marketers.

"Parents may not want their kids to be served ads and they definitely don't want their kids to be served personalized ads based on profiles," she said.

Based on the study, she said, "There is a potential to develop these detailed profiles. There was also a transmission of geolocation and phone numbers, which many parents would object to."

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Citation: US probes mobile apps for data collection on kids (Update) (2012, December 10) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-makers-cellphone-apps.html>

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