

Steady rise in government data requests, Google reports (Update)

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A Google logo is seen through windows of Moscone Center in San Francisco during Google's annual developer conference on June 28, 2012. Google on Wednesday reported a "steady increase" in government requests to hand over data from Internet users in the second half of 2012.

Google on Wednesday reported a "steady increase" in government requests to hand over data from Internet users in the second half of 2012.

The Web giant's semiannual "transparency report" showed the most requests came from the the United States, with 8,438 requests for information about 14,868 users.

India was second with 2,431 requests for data about 4,106 users, followed by France, where Google received 1,693 requests for information about 2,063 users. Germany, Britain and Brazil rounded out the top six, Google said.

"The steady increase in government requests for our users' data continued in the second half of 2012, as usage of our services continued to grow," said Richard Salgado, Google's head of law enforcement and information security.

"User data requests of all kinds have increased by more than 70 percent since 2009," he said in a blog posting.

"In total, we received 21,389 requests for information about 33,634 users from July through December 2012."

Google said it supplied at least some of the requested data in 68 percent of cases, down from 76 percent in late 2010.

In releasing details of requests in the United States, Google said 68 percent of the requests it received from government entities were through subpoenas, which "are the easiest to get because they typically don't involve judges," according to Salgado.

Another 22 percent were through search warrants, mostly issued by judges when there is "probable cause" related to a crime.

Google provided at least some data in 90 percent of the requests in the United States in late 2012, compared with 94 percent two years earlier.

Berin Szoka of the Washington think tank TechFreedom said the report shows "a disturbing growth in government surveillance online."

"On its own, the growth in number of requests for private information like emails should be alarming, especially after the Petraeus case," he said, referring to the disclosure of email exchanges that led to the resignation of CIA director David Petraeus.

"Even more disturbing is that most requests have not been reviewed by a court to ensure that law enforcement has established probable cause to believe a crime has actually been committed, as the (constitution's) Fourth Amendment generally requires."

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