

Spain opens privacy case against Google

June 20 2013



The Google website for Spain on a laptop in a cafe in Granada on June 11, 2008. Spain launched sanction proceedings against Google Inc. on Thursday for suspected serious breaches of data protection laws, acting just hours after France threatened the group with big fines.

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The Spanish Data Protection Agency said it found evidence of five

serious [privacy law](#) breaches—each punishable with fines of up to 300,000 euros (\$395,000).

It also cited evidence of one minor infraction, which could be punished with a fine up to 40,000 euros.

The agency said it acted after investigating [Google's](#) new policy, introduced last year, which enables it to track the activity of users across its search engine, Gmail, the Google+ social [networking platform](#) and other services it owns, which include YouTube.

The changes make it easier for Google to collect and process data that could be used by advertisers to target individuals with offers tailored to their specific interests, thereby increasing the company's revenue potential.

Spain said Google Spain and [Google Inc.](#)'s new policy could allow it to combine personal information collected from different services and use it for other ends.

"Google does not give clear information about the use it will make of users' data, so they are unable to know precisely why their [personal data](#) is being collected or how it will be used," the agency said in a statement.

The [data protection agency](#) listed the suspected serious infractions as:

- Disproportionate use of private data;
- Diverting private data for other uses;
- Storing private data for excessive or undetermined periods;
- Failure to handle [private data](#) in a legitimate way;

— Obstructing users in the exercise of their rights.

Google was also suspected of the minor infraction of failing to provide information to users.

The Spanish agency said it investigated Google within the framework of a coordinated action with data protection agencies in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

The 27-member [European Union](#) warned Google in October 2012 that its data protection procedures did not comply with an EU directive on the subject and gave the company four months to change them.

That deadline passed without any action, prompting France to set up the task force of individual member states interested in pursuing the issue with Google.

France on Thursday threatened Google with a fine of up to 150,000 euros if it does not bring its privacy procedures into line with French law on data protection within three months.

Google has defended the changes it made last year on the ground that they simplify and standardise its approach across its various services.

But critics argue that the policy, which offers no ability to opt out aside from refraining from signing into Google services, gives the operator of the world's largest search engine unprecedented ability to monitor its users.

Google has repeatedly stated that its privacy policy respects European law.

Citation: Spain opens privacy case against Google (2013, June 20) retrieved 18 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-spain-privacy-case-google.html>

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