

Twitter says government info requests on the rise (Update)

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A sign is posted on the exterior of the Twitter headquarters on February 5, 2014 in San Francisco, California

Government requests for Twitter user information are on the rise, the messaging service said as it released figures while pressing for more transparency.

"Over the past 24 months, we've received a 66 percent increase in

requests for account information coming from more than 45 different countries impacting over 6,400 accounts around the world," Twitter's global legal policy manager Jeremy Kessel said in a blog post Thursday.

"The majority of global government requests for account information still come from the US government (59 percent in the latest report)."

Twitter said it got 833 information requests in the United States in the last six months of 2013, including 100 "emergency" requests.

These affected some 1,300 accounts, and Twitter provided some information in 69 percent of these cases, the company said in its "transparency report."

The global total was 1,410 requests, up from 849 in its first report in early 2012.

Kessel said Twitter would press for greater transparency than allowed in an agreement last week with major technology firms—which allowed the publication of secret court orders, but only within large ranges, such as between zero and 1,000.

"While this agreement is a step in the right direction, these ranges do not provide meaningful or sufficient transparency for the public, especially for entities that do not receive a significant number of—or any—national security requests," he said.

"We think it is essential for companies to be able to disclose numbers of national security requests of all kinds... separately from reporting on all other requests."

Twitter's report also provided a country-by-country breakdown of requests for removing material, which may be due to defamatory

statements or content prohibited in various countries.

France had the largest number of removal requests, 309, including three court orders; Twitter said it removed the material in 35 percent of these cases in France, affecting 133 tweets.

France represented the overwhelming majority of these requests, which amounted to 365 globally.

In the United States, Twitter only received two court orders and six other requests and did not remove any tweets.

Facing a legal challenge from tech giants Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft and Yahoo, the Justice Department last month freed the companies to release the approximate number of customer accounts targeted.

Under the agreement filed with the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, the companies will be able to disclose the numbers, within ranges.

They will have an option to reveal within bands of 1,000 the numbers of "national security letters" and specific court orders. Another option will be to disclose, in bands of 250, all the national security requests, lumped together.

Previously, the existence of orders made by the secret court for access to private online data was itself classified, to the outrage of the firms.

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