

Oculus responds to Sen. Al Franken's VR privacy questions

May 19 2016, by By Derrik J. Lang



In this Jan. 6, 2016 file photo, Alison Weber, left, instructs Peijun Guo on using the Oculus Rift VR headset at the Oculus booth at CES International in Las Vegas. Oculus has responded to Sen. Al Franken's questions about consumer privacy when using the Oculus Rift virtual reality system. They say collecting the physical movements of users is a necessary tool to deliver "a safe, comfortable and seamless VR experience." (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

The virtual reality company Oculus relies heavily on Facebook for

security and shares information about its users with VR creators.

Those details were among the insights Oculus provided in response to Sen. Al Franken's questions about consumers' privacy when using Oculus' VR systems.

Franken posted the response from the Facebook-owned company Thursday detailing how Oculus collects and stores user data.

Oculus' head-mounted Rift system features a pair of high-definition screens that surrounded users' visions with views of virtual worlds. The headset is worn on users' heads and can detect movement, location and sound.

Oculus said collecting the physical movements of users is a necessary tool to deliver "a safe, comfortable and seamless VR experience."

The company also said it relies on Facebook's data centers and technical infrastructure to host its VR platform, as well as over 200 security professionals from Facebook to help keep the data secure.

"We believe VR has the power to change the world by enabling people to experience anything, anywhere, with anyone, and know that this will only be possible if we invest in the security of our community," Jordan McCollum, Oculus' general counsel, wrote in the letter dated May 13.



In this Feb. 13, 2016 file photo, Al Franken attends the 68th Annual Writers Guild Awards in New York. Oculus responded to Sen. Al Franken's questions about consumers' privacy when using the Oculus Rift virtual reality system. The Rift is worn on users' heads and can detect movement, location and sound. Oculus says collecting the physical movements of users is a necessary tool to deliver "a safe, comfortable and seamless VR experience." (Photo by Andy Kropa/Invision/AP, File)

Oculus noted that it shares information with Facebook and aggregated data about users with VR developers but stopped short of indicating whether it has sold such information to third parties.

Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., wrote an open letter to Oculus CEO Brendan Iribe on April 7 asking for details about user data collected by the new VR system. He asked the company to respond by May 13.

Franken called Oculus' response detailed and said he plans to continue working with the company to ensure that users know how data is being collected, used and shared.

The Oculus Rift began shipping to consumers March 28. It costs \$599 and features a headset with a microphone and a pair of high-definition screens capable of broadcasting images when connected to a high-powered PC. The company has struggled to fulfill orders because of component shortages.

Samsung's \$100 Gear VR also utilizes the Oculus' VR platform. Unlike the Rift, the mobile headset must work in tandem with a smartphone.

HTC has a more detailed privacy policy for its HTC Vive, an \$800 system similar to the Rift created in a partnership with video game creator Valve released April 5. The smartphone maker's privacy policy states it "will not share any personally identifiable information with third parties for marketing purposes" without users' consent.

More information: www.oculus.com

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