

Facebook's 'rat-catching team' spies on employees: report

March 20 2018, by Ethan Baron, The Mercury News

Silicon Valley's tech giants are famously secretive—after all their proprietary products and services are worth billions—but a new report alleges that Facebook goes to Orwellian lengths to keep its workers from talking out of turn, even about their working conditions.

One Facebook employee was told he was led to expect a promotion, but instead was taken into a room where members of the Menlo Park social media giant's "rat-catching team" were waiting to interrogate him over an "innocuous" leak to the media, according to the [report](#).

"You get on their bad side and all of a sudden you are face to face with Mark Zuckerberg's secret police," the unidentified man told The Guardian, referring to Facebook's CEO.

The man's grilling was a mere technicality, the news outlet reported.

"They already knew he was guilty of leaking. They had records of a screenshot he'd taken, links he had clicked or hovered over, and they strongly indicated they had accessed chats between him and the journalist, dating back to before he joined the company."

Facebook uses online and real-world surveillance and legal threats to prevent and identify leaks that could jeopardize company secrets or involve criminal activity, The Guardian reported.

"However, those same tools are also used to catch employees and

contractors who talk publicly, even if it's about their [working conditions](#), misconduct or cultural challenges within the company," according to The Guardian.

A Facebook spokeswoman told the news outlet that companies "routinely use business records in workplace investigations, and we are no exception."

For Facebook, part of the problem is the amount of company information that is shared with employees, and that trust is a double-edged sword, according to the report.

"If anyone steps out of line, they'll squash you like a bug," the unidentified man reportedly told The Guardian.

In Europe, the contract workers hired to spot and block content Facebook prohibits are subjected to extremely intrusive oversight, the report suggested.

"One European Facebook content moderator signed a contract, seen by the Guardian, which granted the company the right to monitor and record his social media activities, including his personal Facebook account, as well as emails, phone calls and internet use," according to the report.

"He also agreed to random personal searches of his belongings including bags, briefcases and car while on [company](#) premises. Refusal to allow such searches would be treated as gross misconduct."

In Dublin, after The Guardian reported on working conditions in Facebook's operations there, the firm came down hard on the side of secrecy.

"On more than one occasion someone would print something and you'd find management going through the log to see what they had printed," a purported former worker reportedly told the [news outlet](#).

Security teams would plant "mouse trap" USB flash drives containing around the office to "test staff loyalty," according to the report.

"If you find a USB or something you'd have to give it in straight away. If you plugged it into a computer it would throw up a flare and you'd be instantly escorted out of the building," the purported former worker reportedly said.

The employee surveillance described in the report is "common, widespread, intrusive and legal," Al Gidari, consulting director of privacy at the Stanford Center for Internet and Society, told The Guardian.

"Companies are required to take steps to detect and deter criminal misconduct, so it's not surprising they are using the same tools to make sure employees are in compliance with their contractual obligations."

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