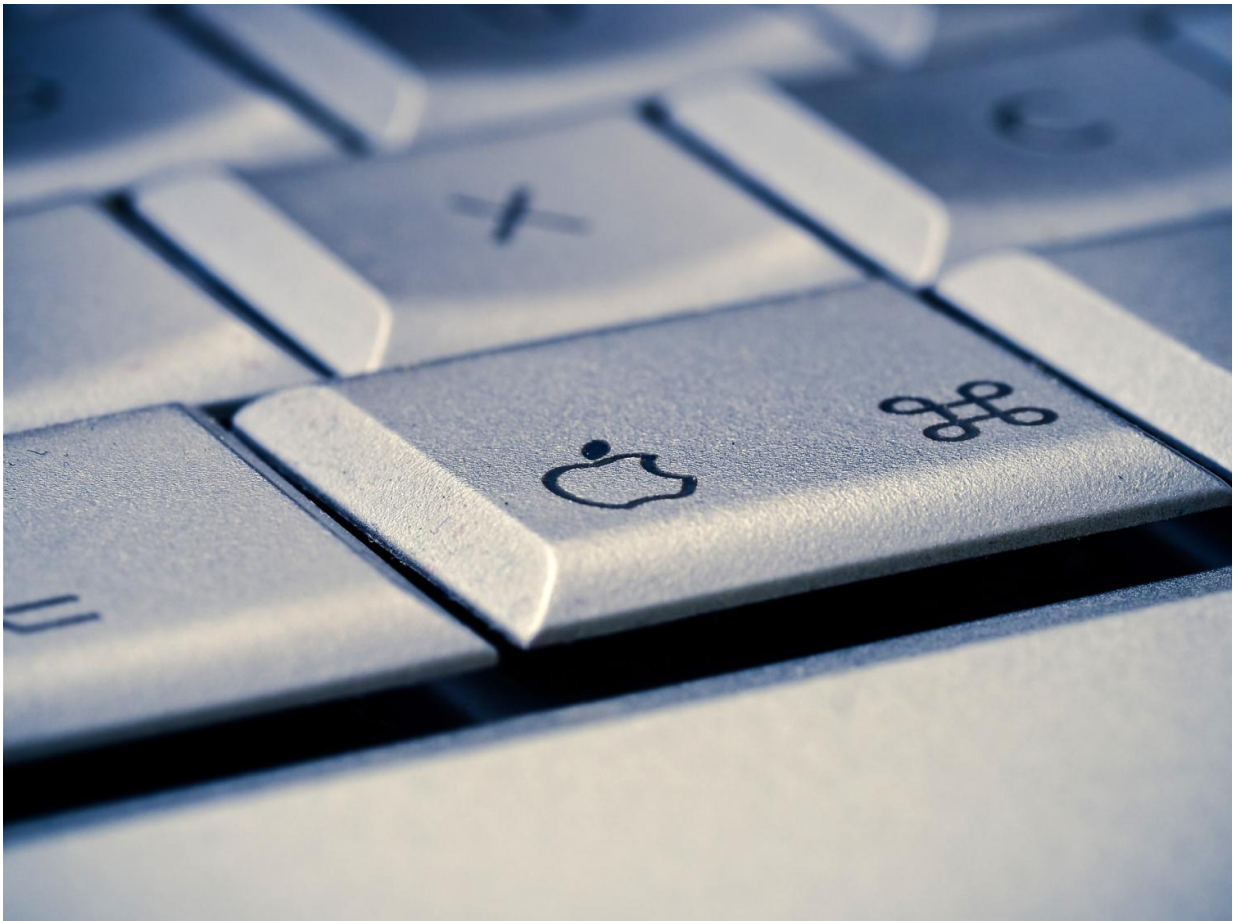


Is Apple really better about privacy? Here's what we found out

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Is Apple the shining knight when it comes to privacy collection, as it

wants us to believe?

A different business model than Facebook and Google gives it some ground to claim a tighter fortress around your [data](#). But that's not the whole story, and some changes are coming.

In the wake of the disclosure that nearly 90 million Facebook users' information were passed on to political ad targeting firm Cambridge Analytica without their consent, [tech companies](#) are on the defensive. Consumers and lawmakers want to know how much they've collected of their choices and movements, and what they do with their [personal information](#).

Apple has made a point of trying to differentiate its approach to consumers' information. On its website, it notes that it collects less data about us than the other big tech companies, and then bumps up the security by scrambling it so it doesn't identify who it comes from. Additionally, it says it keeps most of the data on our devices, as opposed to Apple servers, and it's encrypted on those devices and only accessible via your passcode.

And it says it will make it easier to track the information the company collects about us, and to download or delete it, later this year. Currently, getting the data back from Apple is cumbersome and slow.

The new tools are to comply with new privacy rules, called General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that go into effect in the European Union in late May. In a nutshell, the rules look to get the user more controls over how their data is used.

The major tech companies are all beefing up their privacy stance to deal with these new rules and consumer blowout over the Facebook data scandal.

Apple's approach

So how is Apple different? The iPhone and Macbook maker can make some claims to privacy that stem from a hardware, not advertising, based-business model. It sells products to us, primarily hardware like phones, computers, watches and tablets.

Remember that with Facebook and Google, we are the engines that enable the companies to sell advertising. When we like a post, check in to a restaurant, ask for directions to a business or search for a hotel to visit, Facebook and Google learn more about us, and coupled with our demographic and location information, can help advertisers to reach us—making the two companies the juggernauts of digital advertising.

Apple insists that it "doesn't gather your personal information to sell to advertisers or other organizations." Such a statement only goes so far—Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg makes a point of saying Facebook doesn't sell users' data to advertisers, either. What the social network sells advertisers' access to users, who brands can target with all the information it's gleaned from their activity on the network.

As for Apple, our always-on iPhones gather up a lot of information, too. When we turn on our phones, the GPS knows where we are, what we do and where we go. When we ask Siri for directions or a recipe, Apple takes note. But Apple mostly isn't trying to show us advertising based on our interests.

The iPhone maker tries to differentiate itself further. Unlike Facebook and Google, Apple says it scrambles this information, and looks at patterns of usage, not at who it's coming from.

Apple says that once scrambled, it combines it with the data of millions of others. "So we see general patterns, rather than specifics that could be

traced back to you. These patterns help us identify things like the most popular emoji, the best QuickType suggestions, and energy consumption rates in Safari," the company says.

The company does admit that it freely collects [information](#) about what music we listen to, what movies, books and apps we download, which is "aggregated" and used to help Apple make recommendations.

Also, it does sell ads, but on a much smaller scale.

If you want to see your Apple data

As we discovered when we downloaded our data directly back from Facebook and Google, the social network had made copies of every photo I'd ever posted and held onto phone numbers, addresses and names of my friends. Google had kept copies of every search made, including ones conducted in "Incognito," mode, which is advertised as private searching.

What Apple won't do, at least for now, is make it easy for you to get your data so you can check out what exactly Apple has held onto. Facebook and Google offer this service, via a download request that can take a few hours to generate. Then you get an e-mail link to download it yourself and get shocked at just how much the social network and search giant has held onto.

Apple hides the data request deep inside the privacy section of the website. To get there, it's four clicks from the main page, and buried in the 11th sub-head on the page.

You can also call Apple Care at 1-800-692-7753 to request that Apple deletes your data, if that's your choice.

Apple says it will streamline the process to make it more user friendly soon, making it easier to get a copy of your data and tools to deactivate and/or delete your account beginning in May, in Europe. It will roll out the more consumer friendly privacy page here later this year.

Apple does sell ads

Meanwhile, Apple also does sells ads as well, on a far smaller scale. These appear in the News app and App Store, based on your interests. By default, on the iPhone you've allowed Apple to serve you ads based on what it thinks are your interests.

"To ensure ads are relevant, Apple's advertising platform creates groups of people, called segments, who share similar characteristics and uses these groups for delivering targeted ads," reads the policy.

Want to stop Apple from doing this? Go to the settings section on the iPhone, click Privacy, and click advertising at the way bottom. Click the LIMIT AD TRACKING tab. You'll also need to click AD INFORMATION to opt out of ad targeting in the Apple News app and the App Store.

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