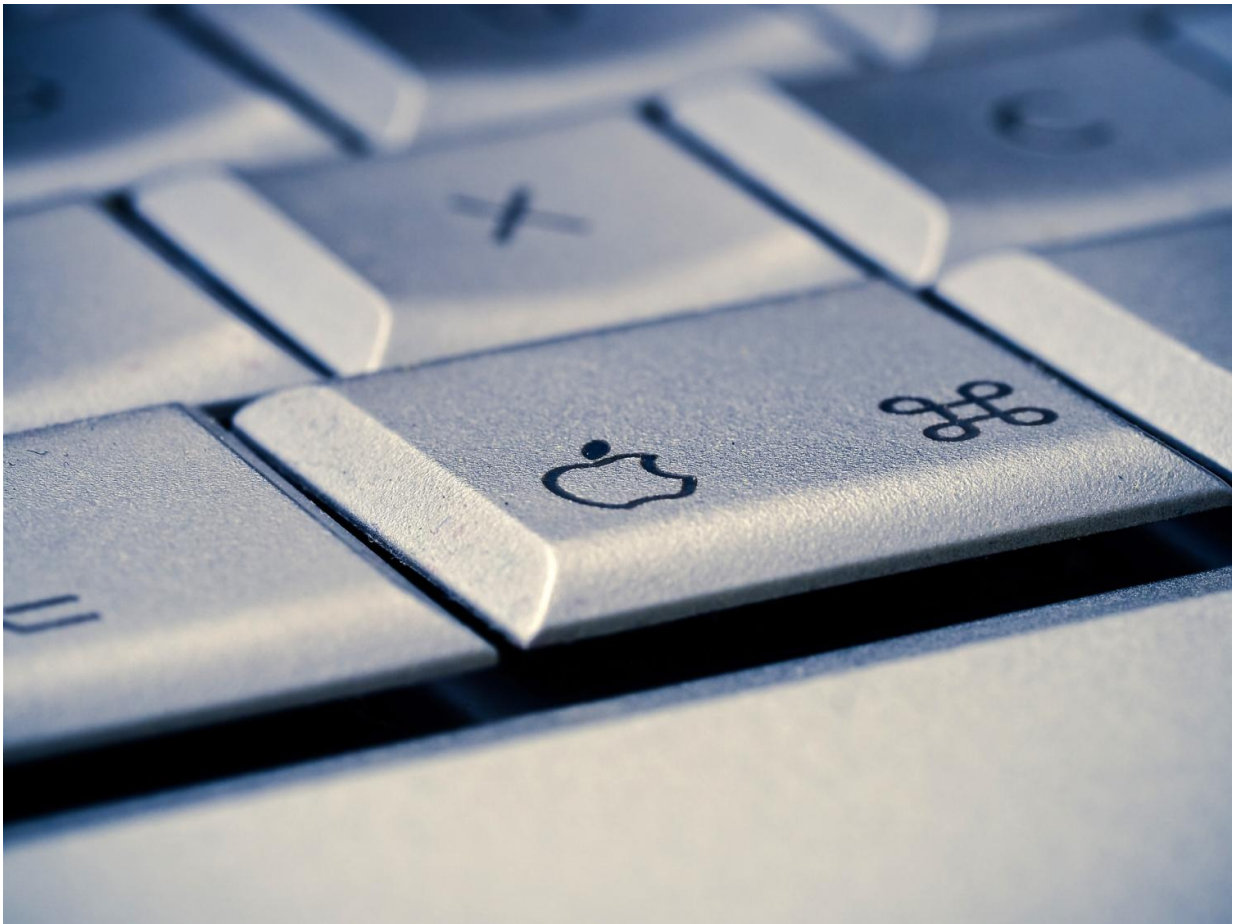


Apple took 8 days to give me the data it had collected on me. It was eye opening.

May 4 2018, by Jefferson Graham, Usa Today



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

How much does Apple know about me? The answer surprised me.

Following Facebook's acknowledgement that it had let a political ad targeting firm scrape the [personal data](#) of 87 million users, I rushed to see what kind of personal data the social network and Google had gathered on me. Both had more information, reaching back longer, than I had envisioned.

So Apple was next. I use an iPhone, iPad and two Mac computers, and Apple also offers data downloads in the [privacy](#) section of its website. It's hard to find, and once you do make the connection, you can expect a hefty wait to get the results.

But don't expect to stay up all night reading what Apple has on you.

The zip file I eventually received from Apple was tiny, only 9 megabytes, compared to 243 MB from Google and 881 MB from Facebook. And there's not much there, because Apple says the information is primarily kept on your device, not its servers. The one sentence highlight: a list of my downloads, purchases and repairs, but not my search histories through the Siri personal assistant or the Safari browser.

First, the wait

It took eight days for my data to arrive from Apple, from a European office that is handling the privacy requests. After making the request, the iPhone maker first asked for my street address, [phone number](#), the serial number of the iPhone, and other personal information before releasing it. This compares to Google and Facebook's data dump. They asked no questions, and the results arrived swiftly—Facebook within minutes, and Google within hours.

What I got

Apple's file on me took longer but was lightweight—a testimony, according to the company, of how little it collects and stores on its individual users.

According to the file, it had made time stamps of when I backed up my iPhone, when I uploaded photos to iCloud and really boring things like that. It had stored my e-mail and physical address, but not the phone number, which is odd, since the information came from the iPhone.

It kept a copy of every app and song I'd downloaded, every tune I'd added to my iTunes music library, and every time I needed repair on a multitude of Apple devices going back a decade.

What it didn't include

What Apple didn't share with me is all the questions I've asked the Siri [personal digital assistant](#), queries it gathers to make the artificial intelligence smarter.

The company says the data wouldn't tell an individual user anything, since it's not associated with him or her. Your Siri requests — "Show me how to get to PF Chang's," or "What year was Steve Jobs born?" go back to Apple—but it uses a random identifier to mask your identity. So a Siri search for the closest Chipotle restaurant will only tell Apple that a user requested the data, but not associate it with me.

The company says flatly that it doesn't want your [personal information](#) and doesn't store it.

On the Safari browser on my Macs, my browsing history goes back to July, 2017, but Apple says it doesn't track that information.

As a result, the personal download is very different from what I got from

competitors Facebook and Google, which both track our moves, likes and queries in order to sell targeted advertising to sponsors.

Apple says it's in a different business, one based on selling you products, not selling advertisers access to your attention—for the most part.

On a far more limited basis than Facebook or Google, Apple does sell targeted ads based on our interests in the News and App Store apps.

To find what Apple has on you here, you need to go to the device. Click Settings, Privacy, Advertising. Then select "View Ad Information."

On my iPhone, Apple told me that the Washington Post and Politico are "targeting" me, which I guess should make me feel good as I actually read them.

How to download everything Apple knows about you

You make the request at apple.com/privacy/contact target="_blank">[www.apple.com/privacy/contact](https://apple.com/privacy/contact) and then choose from "Privacy Issues," in the contact form. Write a sentence explaining that you want your personal data and download histories.

Apple says it is moving to one-click requests—which would put it on par with Facebook and Google—in May, but only for European countries at first, to comply with new privacy regulations going into effect May 25th. It says it will have the easier and less confusing privacy requests here later in the year.

Apple makes a big deal about its different approach to privacy on the company website, and it paints quite an effective selling proposition for buying an iPhone vs. a Samsung Galaxy or Google Pixel phone.

Paul-Olivier Dehaye, who runs the PersonalData.IO website from Switzerland, gives Apple generally good marks for its approach to privacy "by keeping everything on the device, their incentives are better."

Overall, Apple keeps less data on me than Facebook or Google. Once you read it, it's more of a shrug.

But what Apple really needs to do now is not wait to take care of its customers in the United States, home to its biggest customer base, with easier tools to get our data back, it needs to do it now. Since there's so little to report back that Apple kept on us, why make it so hard?

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