

Hey Portal, Facebook might want to cut the losses now on the video device

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Imagine the politician who gets caught in a scandal, breaching the public's trust, whether that be of a sexual nature, misspending taxpayer money or just doing something dumb.

The response is usually immediate: Step down. Resign.

So what of a company that has had [security breach](#) after security breach and just doesn't seem to be able to get around them? And when the company is called Facebook and it looks to sell you a new video-chat device for the home with a built-in camera that can, believe or not, "move around the kitchen...and adjust to follow the action," would you buy it?

The history probably doesn't instill much confidence. Thus our friendly suggestion for Facebook, which will be competing with Amazon's second-generation of the Echo Show video speaker and Google's new Home Hub, officially released Monday, is simple: Cut the losses and drop out.

Remember that it was just a few weeks ago that Facebook disclosed that nearly 30 million members of the social network had their names, addresses and other personal information stolen in the latest hack attempt.

So how to follow those up? With an invitation to buy the video chat device Portal, out in mid-November, and starting at \$199, a talking

speaker that's being sold as "Private by nature." Well, this week, ahem, there was an admission by Facebook that it will track who you called, where the callers live and how often you speak on Portal to sell ads based on this information to you and others on Facebook platforms.

Just what every American wants for Christmas: an electronic home monitor.

Facebook didn't respond to our multiple requests for comment.

Many consumers have resisted putting Amazon Echo or the Google Home talking speakers in their homes because they were concerned about having microphones in a device that could record our conversation. Amazon and Google's defense has been that the units only record when you use the "Alexa," or "Hey, Google" wake word.

Justin Brookman doesn't doubt the companies on that. "They may not record everything today. But that could change over time. That's why I won't put one in my home."

Brookman, the director of privacy and technology policy for the Consumers Union, is even more sanguine about talking video speakers.

"I just don't see the value," in agreeing to put units with cameras (Facebook Portal and Amazon Echo Show) into the home, he says. "They know enough me about as it is."

It was a big week for privacy, starting with Facebook's update to tech news site Recode that it would be monitoring the calls on the device, and then Apple's 360-degree different take on privacy, with an updated section of its website.

Apple launched new, easier-to-find tools to download the data that

Apple collects on us—which is minimal—and to tout its different take on consumer information. One of the new tools, included in an update to Apple's operating system for Mac computers, looks to put an end to the practice of companies following you with ads after you surf by asking permission before you allow them to put cookies on your computer.

But then, Apple is primarily in the hardware business, selling over 200 million iPhones yearly, as well as iPads, Macintosh computers, the Apple Watch, and software like iTunes movie rentals, the Apple Music subscription service and iCloud backup storage.

Facebook is a free social network that, instead of a paid subscription, operates by selling ads. So Apple can afford to take the high road.

The social network's struggles are so great this week, it signed up a former British politician to head up its public relations department. Former British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was named vice-president of global affairs and communications, reporting to Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg.

"Our company is on a critical journey," Sandberg said. "The challenges we face are serious and clear and now more than ever we need new perspectives to help us through this time of change."

Which is why we think that instead of trying to sell a product that clearly doesn't have privacy on its mind to a skeptical public, why not instead just work on fixing the social network's hacking issues, which have been pretty much running non-stop since the discovery of how Russians wreaked havoc with Facebook in the 2016 election, and haven't stopped since?

Good luck!

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