Google opens path in Europe for being 'forgotten'

May 30 2014, by Glenn Chapman

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The move came just weeks after the European Court of Justice ruled that individuals have the right to have links to information about them

deleted from searches under certain circumstances, such as it being outdated or inaccurate.

To comply with the recent European court ruling, Google launched a webform available for Europeans to request the removal of results from the search engine.

"The court's ruling requires Google to make difficult judgments about an individual's right to be forgotten and the public's right to know," a Google spokesman said in a statement emailed to AFP.

Google is creating an advisory committee to help strike a balance between freedom of information and people's rights when it comes to not being haunted by untruths or acts from the past on the Internet.

The group includes former Google chief Eric Schmidt, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, Oxford Internet Institute ethics professor Luciano Floridi, Leuven University law school director Peggy Valcke, former Spanish data protection agency director Jose Luis Pinar and UN envoy on freedom of expression Frank La Rue.

"I'm delighted to join the international advisory committee established by Google to evaluate the ethical and legal challenges posed by the Internet," Floridi said in a written statement.

"It is an exciting initiative which will probably require some hard and rather philosophical thinking."

ID required

A web form posted on a Google support page asked Europeans interested in being forgotten to identify who they are, which specific links they want removed from search results and why.

Those making requests must prove they are who they say they are by providing digital copies of a form of photo identification such as national identity cards or drivers' licenses.

They are also asked to electronically sign the request.

Requests will be reviewed individually by someone at Google, and not handled by automated software.

Google declined to estimate how long it might be until links begin disappearing, saying factors such as whether requests are clear cut will affect how long it takes.

"We're working to finalize our implementation of removal requests under European data protection law as soon as possible," Google said in a note atop the web form.

"In the meantime, please fill out the form... and we will notify you when we start processing your request."

Google quoted the court ruling as saying that users can ask Internet search engines to remove results for queries that include their names and trigger results deemed "inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant, or excessive in relation to the purposes for which they were processed."

The form explained that Google will look at whether the targeted results are in the public interest, such as information about financial scams, professional malpractice, criminal convictions or public misconduct by government officials.

Not gone everywhere

Google described the form as "an initial effort" and explained it will

work with data protection authorities in the months ahead to refine the process.

Links would only be removed in Europe, where a message accompanying search results would indicate that they have been modified to comply with legal requirements there.

Any links removed from searches in Europe would continue to appear in Google results displayed as they typically would in other geographic regions.

Prior to launching the webform, California-based Google received thousands of requests for removal of links to deeds or critiques.

Google did not disclose details, but online reports indicated they include a pedophile and a politician who want references to their past to vanish.

The court ruling has raised concerns about online censorship and how Internet search works in various countries.

Analysts said the global impact of the ruling was not immediately clear, but that it could raise some tricky issues in Europe and beyond.

Worries also arose that letting people edit their online histories could hamper investigative journalism.

The case highlights growing concerns about so-called online reputation management, which has spawned an industry that helps eliminate or minimize damaging information online.

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