

Uber vows not to trick regulators with 'Greyball' tool

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Analysts say Uber's rocky past month underscores the need for more mature management at the world's most valuable venture-backed startup

Uber on Wednesday promised not to use a recently uncovered "Greyball" software program to trick regulators trying to catch drivers breaking the law.

The smartphone-summoned ride service last week acknowledged the use of the secret software program to steer drivers away from trouble, including sting operations by local authorities to catch lawbreakers.

"We have started a review of the different ways this technology has been used to date," Uber chief security officer Joe Sullivan said in an online post titled an 'update on greyballing.'

"In addition, we are expressly prohibiting its use to target action by local regulators going forward."

He noted that due to how Uber systems are configured, it "will take some time to ensure this prohibition is fully enforced."

According to Uber, the tool was used in cities where it was not banned from operating, and the main intent was to protect drivers from disruption by competitors using the smartphone application to interfere instead of summon legitimate rides.

"This technology is used to hide the standard city app view for individual riders, enabling Uber to show that same rider a different version," Sullivan said in the post.

"It's been used for many purposes, for example: the testing of new features by employees; marketing promotions; fraud prevention; to protect our partners from physical harm; and to deter riders using the app in violation of our terms of service."

Uber came forward about its "Greyball" software after a New York Times report which said the program aimed to deceive authorities in markets around the world.

Hunt for help

Uber on Tuesday began searching for a second-in-command to help embattled chief executive Travis Kalanick steady the wheel at the fast-growing on-demand ride service.

After a series of embarrassing revelations, Uber faces challenges in keeping growth on track, with Kalanick pressured to yield some control.

Analysts say Uber's rocky past month—marred by disclosures about a culture of sexism and its covert use of law enforcement-evading software—underscores the need for more mature management at the world's most valuable venture-backed startup.

Uber lost tens of thousands of users from the dust-up when Kalanick joined and then quit a panel advising President Donald Trump. This and the other incidents could have dented its value, which has been pegged at a whopping \$68 billion.

San Francisco-based Uber last month hired former attorney general Eric Holder to review workplace conditions after an ex-employee alleged sexual harassment and sexism at the firm.

Separately, Google's parent company Alphabet filed a lawsuit against Uber alleging the ridesharing firm used stolen technology for its autonomous driving program.

Adding to the pile-up of woes, Kalanick last week was forced to make a humbling apology after a video showed him verbally abusing a driver for the service; at the same time he admitted "I must fundamentally change as a leader and grow up."

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