



**Federal Trade Commission  
Privacy Impact Assessment**

**Twitter**

**March 2014**

## **SECTION 1.0 – SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF THE FTC’S USE OF TWITTER**

### **1.1 – What is the specific purpose of the agency’s use of Twitter, and how does that use fit with the agency’s broader mission?**

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC or Commission) uses Twitter, a microblogging website (i.e., a blog consisting of short posts or messages limited to 140 characters), to disseminate information to the public. Currently, the FTC maintains two Twitter accounts. Two accounts: “@FTC” in English and “@laFTC” in Spanish, are administered by the Office of Public Affairs (OPA). Four accounts, “@EdithRamirezFTC,” “@JulieBrillFTC,” “@MOhlhausenFTC,” and “@Josh\_WrightFTC” are managed by Chairwoman Ramirez, and Commissioners Julie Brill, Maureen Ohlhausen, and Joshua D. Wright, respectively. The seventh and final account, “@TechFTC,” is managed by the FTC’s Chief Technologist.

<http://twitter.com/FTC>

<http://www.twitter.com/laFTC>

[www.twitter.com/EdithRamirezFTC](http://www.twitter.com/EdithRamirezFTC)

<http://www.twitter.com/JulieBrillFTC>

<http://www.twitter.com/MOhlhausenFTC>

[http://www.twitter.com/Josh\\_WrightFTC](http://www.twitter.com/Josh_WrightFTC)

<http://www.twitter.com/TechFTC>

The FTC Twitter pages are public, so anyone can visit the pages and read the agency’s tweets, even visitors who are not registered Twitter users. In contrast, only registered users can post tweets on Twitter, and tweets from other users do not show up in the FTC’s home streams unless retweeted by an FTC account.

Twitter allows the FTC to promote information, tips, and resources to consumers and organizations that may not be regular visitors to FTC websites. Information (“tweets”) posted to FTC Twitter accounts is generally content that already exists on FTC.gov and FTC.gov/espanol or is relevant information from the Bureaus of Consumer Protection, Competition, and Economics, as well as other offices of the FTC, and including the Commissioners and Chief Technologist.

Typical tweets may include, but are not limited to, consumer and business tips and information as well as links to photos, news articles and short videos. OPA approves the content of all @FTC and @laFTC tweets, including, but not limited to, press releases, speeches, and information from the Bureaus of Consumer Protection, Competition, and Economics, as well as other offices of the FTC. Tweets that reflect the opinions of individual Commissioners, the Chair or other FTC staff members are attributed appropriately. Tweets from @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausenFTC, and @Josh\_WrightFTC are sent by the Chairwoman and the Commissioners, respectively. Tweets from @TechFTC are sent by the agency’s Chief Technologist, and although the latter accounts are official FTC accounts, tweets do not represent the opinions of the Commission.

#### **Tweets/Retweets**

The Commission promotes FTC resources to the public. These tweets will all appear in reverse chronological order in the FTC's profile pages. Additionally, any Twitter users who indicate that they "follow" an FTC account will receive that information in their Twitter "stream" called the timeline. In turn, users may share the FTC's resources with their network of Twitter followers (generally done by sending out the same tweet and giving credit to the FTC's original tweet, called a "retweet" and abbreviated as RT) and others can do the same, providing a viral marketing component to the Commission's outreach and education efforts.

### **Mentions**

If a registered user posts a tweet that includes the FTC's account handles (@FTC, @laFTC, @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausenFTC, @Josh\_WrightFTC and/or @TechFTC), this is called a mention. The tweet will appear in the user's profile and home stream as well as the timelines of all followers of that user. Additionally, that tweet will show up in the interactions stream of the FTC account.

If a user posts a tweet with @FTC, @laFTC, @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausenFTC, @Josh\_WrightFTC, or @TechFTC at the beginning of the tweet, it will only show up in the home streams of users who follow both that user and the FTC account. However, all public tweets (meaning the account is not locked or protected) are searchable by anyone on Twitter's website (or other third party sites linked to Twitter) so anyone can do a search of mentions of @FTC, @laFTC, @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausen, @Josh\_WrightFTC or @TechFTC on Twitter.

Public tweets may also be picked up by other search engines (e.g., Bing, Google, Yahoo!) or aggregator sites or applications outside of Twitter. The FTC cannot delete tweets sent by other users even if they mention an FTC account, but the FTC can block Twitter users or other messages (see below) being received from accounts that are deemed as harassing toward the FTC. Additionally, "spam" style Twitter accounts can be reported and Twitter will investigate and delete the account if necessary.

### **Direct Messages**

Private messages between registered Twitter users are called "Direct Messages." These messages are stored in a "Direct Message file" accessible only to the registered Twitter user. Only another registered user whom you follow can send you a direct message (and you must follow them to send them one back).

## **1.2 – Is the agency's use of Twitter consistent with all applicable laws, regulations, and polices?**

The President's January 21, 2009 memorandum on *Transparency and Open Government* and the OMB Director's December 8, 2009 *Open Government Directive* call on federal departments and agencies to harness new technologies to engage with the public. Twitter has over 200 million active users. Using tools like Twitter helps the FTC to communicate with consumers on platforms where they're active, which in turns helps the FTC meet the federal guidance outlined in the directive and memorandum including the goals of transparency, participation and collaboration.

With respect to the information that the FTC will disseminate through its Twitter accounts, the FTC Act authorizes the FTC to prevent unfair and deceptive acts and practices in interstate commerce and, in furtherance of this mission, to gather, compile, and make information available in the public interest. See 15 U.S.C. 45, 46(a), (f).

Per federal guidance, the FTC includes exit scripts/and other notices to consumers when linking to Twitter from FTC websites who opt to visit a third-party site where the FTC's privacy policy does not apply. An example of an FTC exit script for Twitter is available [here](#). Additionally, notices are placed as appropriate on each FTC account informing visitors that [Twitter's privacy policy](#) governs on the site.

## **SECTION 2.0 – IS THERE ANY PII THAT IS LIKELY TO BECOME AVAILABLE TO THE AGENCY THROUGH THE USE OF TWITTER?**

### **2.1 – What PII will be made available to the FTC?**

Twitter requires users to provide their first name, last name, a valid email address, and a password, with the option to provide additional information in their biography when they register an account. Even though some of this information may be accessible to the FTC, depending on a Twitter user's privacy settings (users can protect their tweets by a private account setting), the FTC does not intend to collect, disseminate, or maintain any of the information provided to Twitter.

The FTC may, however, read, review, or rely upon information that individuals make available to the public or to the FTC on Twitter, including tweets that may appear on the @FTC, @laFTC, @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausenFTC, @Josh\_WrightFTC or @TechFTC interactions pages, as authorized or required by law (e.g., if there is evidence of a law violation).

The FTC routinely monitors FTC-related keyword on Twitter and other third-party applications in an effort to determine what kind of public attention the FTC is generating online. Generally, comments that the FTC may collect or maintain as part of such review would be collected and/or maintained without the individual Twitter handle that identifies them. The Office of Public Affairs may elect to include Twitter handles in the following instances:

- Twitter handles of news organizations, journalists, and influential blogs and bloggers may be collected and distributed for use in daily news clips to lend credibility to tweets;
- Use of Twitter handles may be collected and maintained as an official record during interactive Twitter chats or other live events hosted by the FTC; and
- When answering questions directed to @FTC, @laFTC, @EdithRamirezFTC, @JulieBrillFTC, @MOhlhausenFTC, @Josh\_WrightFTC, or @TechFTC, the FTC may collect and maintain comments, including the Twitter handles of those users who posted the questions.

In the instances listed above, the FTC intends to keep a record of the information (generally a screen shot of the comment saved as a PDF electronically and on paper), but does not intend to collect or maintain the records in any type of database from which the records will be retrieved specifically by a Twitter handle. The FTC does not strive to collect every tweet about the agency – only tweets of significance to the Commission’s missions.

Although the FTC does not collect information other than comments with their corresponding Twitter handles from users who discuss the FTC online, users should be aware that the United States Library of Congress, through separate arrangement with Twitter, is maintaining an electronic archive of all public tweets, and intends to make them publicly available within a six-month window from the date of the tweet. The FTC understands that private account information (private profiles or direct messages) will not be part of the Library of Congress archive nor will links or photos associated with those tweets. In addition, as noted earlier, a user’s public tweets will also be accessible to the public through Twitter itself and through other, non-Governmental search engines, aggregators, and applications.

Users interested in more information about [Twitter’s privacy policy](#) should review it online.

Finally, the FTC may collect general analytics from Twitter on a regular basis including the numbers of followers, number of retweets, etc. The Twitter analytics tool automatically makes other information available to the FTC, including sex, location, interests, and other handles the FTC’s follower’s follow; however, the FTC does not plan to collect or track any of this additional information.

## **2.2 – What are the sources of PII?**

The FTC does not have access to the information that Twitter collects to register for the site. The FTC does have access to information that users post to their public profiles. This includes name (real or pseudonym), Twitter handle, location, and any additional information they post in their biography.

## **2.3 – Do the FTC’s activities trigger the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and, if so, how will the agency comply with the statute?**

Per the OMB memorandum, *Social Media, Web-Based Interactive Technologies, and the Paperwork Reduction Act*, the FTC’s use of Twitter as outlined in Section 1.1 is not a web-based interactive technology that would trigger the PRA.

## **SECTION 3.0 THE FTC’S INTENDED OR EXPECTED USE OF PII**

### **Section 3.1 – Generally, how will the agency use the PII described in Section 2.0?**

The FTC collects Twitter handles and comments in the examples outlined in Section 2.1. This includes tweets mentioning or directed at the FTC, regardless of whether they use an FTC account handle or not, which may be collected as part of the agency’s daily clips to highlight the

FTC in the news or in blogs. Additionally, interactions with the FTC through interactive chats and events or general comments on Twitter may generate new records, for which the FTC may choose to collect comments and Twitter handles.

### **Section 3.2 – Provide specific examples of the types of uses to which the PII may be subject.**

When answering questions from consumers that generate new agency records, hosting interactive Twitter chats or other live events, the FTC may collect comments and Twitter handles as agency records. The FTC routinely searches Twitter for agency mentions (including those who do and do not use FTC Twitter handles in their tweets) as part of its Daily Clips packet. If these tweets meet the criteria outlined in Section 2.1, the FTC may collect a Twitter handle.

In accordance with OMB memorandum M-10-22, *Guidance for Online Use of Web Measurement and Customization Technologies*, the FTC uses some analytical data from Twitter to measure the overall number of followers, number of retweets, and similar statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of the FTC's Twitter accounts. The Twitter analytics tool automatically makes other information available to the FTC, including sex, location, interests, and what other handles the FTC's follower's follow; however, the FTC does not plan to collect or track any of this additional information. The FTC will not collect any PII beyond Twitter handles (*see* Sec. 2.1).

## **SECTION 4.0 SHARING OR DISCLOSING OF PII**

### **Section 4.1 – With what entities or persons inside or outside the agency will the PII be shared, and for what purposes will the PII be disclosed?**

Twitter requires a minimum amount of PII collection in order for users to register profiles on the site. This information is outlined in Section 2.0. The FTC does not collect or maintain PII that Twitter collects from registered users, particularly those who engage with the FTC via Twitter including mentioning, following or unfollowing FTC accounts.

Only approved staff members have access to administer FTC Twitter accounts. Generally, all the information available to the FTC through user engagement such as following, unfollowing or mentioning is also publicly available to anyone visiting Twitter.com.

### **Section 4.2 – What safeguards are in place to prevent expansion of use beyond those authorized under law and described in this PIA?**

Only approved FTC staff members have access to manage the FTC's Twitter accounts. Each staff member responsible for managing a social media account must sign and comply with the Commission's internal Rules of Behavior, prior to beginning account administration. This form is required and compliance is monitored through the FTC's Social Media Task Force.

The FTC's Twitter accounts are registered using official FTC email accounts. Administrators are not permitted to use personal accounts to manage FTC Twitter accounts. Furthermore, FTC staff are directed to use official government devices to manage accounts when possible.

Consumers do not have to be registered users of Twitter to see FTC tweets. Furthermore, Twitter is a third-party site and FTC Twitter accounts generally contain comparable information that is available on the FTC's primary official sources of information, including FTC.gov, OnGuardOnline.gov, and NCPW.gov and other resources.

Finally, Twitter users determine what information is publicly available about them beyond standard information required by Twitter. Users control whether their tweets are public or not. The FTC does not collect tweets or handles of private accounts.

## **SECTION 5.0 - MAINTENANCE AND RETENTION OF PII**

### **Section 5.1 – How will the FTC maintain the PII, and for how long?**

If the FTC collects a Twitter handle and comment as part of its daily clips packet or an interactive FTC Twitter event, they are retained and disposed of in accordance with applicable schedules issued or approved by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). If the FTC collects general comments and Twitter handles directed at the agency, they are also retained and disposed of in accordance with applicable schedules issued or approved by NARA.

### **Section 5.2 – Was the retention period established to minimize privacy risk?**

Per the FTC's own privacy policy, the FTC does not collect any information including PII that is unnecessary. For engagement purposes on FTC Twitter accounts, the FTC does not collect or maintain any PII beyond a Twitter handle, which minimizes any privacy risks.

## **SECTION 6.0 – HOW THE AGENCY WILL SECURE PII**

### **Section 6.1 – Will the FTC's privacy and security officials coordinate to develop methods of securing PII?**

Not applicable since the FTC is only capturing Twitter handles, which is publicly available information. See Sections 2.0 and 5.0.

## **SECTION 7.0 – IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION OF OTHER PRIVACY RISKS**

### **Section 7.1 – What other privacy risks exist, and how will the agency mitigate those risks?**

Twitter is a third-party service that uses persistent tracking technologies. In an effort to help consumers understand how their information is used by Twitter, the FTC posts notices on its

Twitter accounts indicating that Twitter’s policy applies on these sites. Furthermore, the FTC informs consumers who link to FTC Twitter accounts from official agency websites, that they are leaving FTC sites where the Commission’s privacy policy no longer applies.

At this time, the Government Services Administration (GSA) does not feel that Twitter’s standard Terms of Services (ToS) agreement requires a specific government ToS. If this changes, the FTC will follow GSA’s lead and get a signed agreement in place.

As much as possible, the FTC uses information that is already publicly available on other FTC websites, thus consumers do not need to visit the agency’s Twitter accounts to find comparable information.

The FTC routinely reviews Twitter’s privacy policies for any changes that may affect the FTC’s use of Twitter and will update its privacy policies as necessary to reflect any changes.

**SECTION 8.0 – CREATION OR MODIFICATION OF A SYSTEM OF RECORDS**

**Section 8.1 – Will the FTC’s activities create or modify a “system of records” under the Privacy Act of 1974?**

The FTC does not collect PII or Twitter handles in a manner that would require the FTC to create or modify a system of records under the Privacy Act of 1974.

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