

August 10, 2018

Federal Trade Commission
Office of the Secretary
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Suite CC-5610 (Annex C)
Washington, DC 20580

Re: Competition and Consumer Protection in the 21st Century Hearing, Project Number P181201

It bothers me that *any* company is collecting and selling the data of business that I conduct online. My business is *my* business, and my private business is supposed to be protected by our government, yet it seems that companies like Google and Amazon take our information and send it out to the world. Before that, you had the same issues with Visa, Mastercard, and American Express. Whenever a person performed an online transaction, there was an opportunity for their data to be out there for the whole world to get ahold of.

Look at what happened with Equifax and all the information that was turned over there. It has ruined many lives and has caused pain and extra work for all of us, but nobody in government seems to care. That is why I believe the Federal Trade Commission needs to step in and regulate these giant tech and media companies, like Google and Facebook, so that our personal online data can no longer be stored and sold without our express consent.

Like anybody else, I use a variety of online services. I don't try to hide from being online, but I do try to protect myself with all of the technical means possible, and it's still very frustrating. Just because a person uses these services doesn't mean they agree with their terms and conditions. Although I'd read through the user agreements years ago, I haven't taken the time to do so recently. However, I realize what privacy I am risking. I have friends who choose *not* to agree to the terms and don't use the services, but I can counteract with various security methods. Still, I should not *have* to do that.

A company's terms and agreements should be more clear and easier to understand. Right now, most of them are gibberish, and the average person has no idea of what they are reading. Just because a person clicks to agree to the terms doesn't make it fair for the companies to collect and sell personal data as they please. These companies all have teams of attorneys writing this stuff, and we individuals usually don't have a background in this type of jargon. All we want to do is buy a pair of jeans on the Internet. We didn't plan on having to sign our lives away with a click. How is that fair?

The major online sources have also overstepped their boundaries by censoring the types of opinions we are allowed to put out into the online world, and this should be of great concern to the FTC. This problem is especially evident with YouTube, a Google subsidiary. Anytime someone puts their opinion out into public using something like YouTube, the platform can edit it in any manner that they choose. Any of these media outlets, like Twitter and Facebook, can control anything anyone else posts to their platform, and that just isn't right. That is why I do not post any information that can be misconstrued online. It shouldn't have to be this way.

If a corporation treated the personal information of its employees the same way Google handles the personal information of customers, they would be thrown in prison. These companies have convinced people, especially younger people, that they do not need a landline and that they must purchase their cellular services. They have essentially mandated that people need to be tracked by their cell phones and followed everywhere they go. Has that become our concept of freedom? Is that liberty? If I want someone to know where I am, it is my right to tell them myself, and not have my cell phone publicly disclose where I am without my permission.

It is not right that these companies are allowed to do whatever they want with our private information. We may be past the time when you would walk into a store, complete a transaction, and be done with it. Somewhere along the way, online companies have crossed a line. I don't want my personal information shared unless I volunteer to share it or have it shared myself. Unfortunately, these companies have made it almost impossible to keep from relying on their convenience. That is why media and tech giants like Google and Facebook should not be able to store and sell our personal online data without our permission.

Sincerely,

Joe Owens