

Facebook: A Change for the Good or Hanging Users Out to Dry?

ISSUE: Is Facebook violating user privacy with its new policy changes as a result of going public?

Introduction

Corporate ethics are very important to any corporation. Most corporations have a Code of Conduct that is available to the public so that investors are aware of what the company stands for and believes in. The top priority of these ethical policies is to prevent criminal activity. They exist to enable employees to be responsible for whistle blowing and integrity. They also exist to keep the corporation accountable for their actions regarding corporate decisions. Facebook, Inc. has recently made some decisions that have and will continue to affect users. Whether or not these changes are ethically responsible still remains to be seen.

Overview

Mark Zuckerberg and Co. took Facebook, Inc. public in May of 2012. During that process, the company made changes to its privacy policies that affected several aspects of sharing user information. These changes drew the attention of the media as well as created tension with its users. There were three major changes, which were advertising, data sharing, and longevity of information storage.

Facebook advertising is a big part of the change. Facebook's Chief Privacy Officer Erin Egan states, "Everything you do and say on Facebook can be used to serve your ads. Our policy says that we can advertise services to you off of Facebook based on data we have on Facebook" (Hill, Facebook Privacy Policy Change). What does this mean to users? It means that companies can see what you are interested in and can use this information to feed you relevant ads based on your Facebook activity.

The second update (tandem with the new advertising policy) is the practice of sharing user information with outside marketing sources. The policy states that "when you or others who can see your content and information use an application, your content and information is shared with the application" (Segall). However, this change is not entirely new. Online applications (apps) have been previously allowed to access user information, as users were required to agree to terms that clearly stated that

user information would be subjected to the app's use. User consent was required, and if the terms were rejected, the app was not loaded. The new part to the change is that users do not have to give consent to have their information accessed. This allows apps and advertisements to market to users who were previously unaware of the existence of new apps and products.

Finally, the third major portion of the changes is the longevity of information existence on Facebook. Many users are unaware that if they deactivate or delete their account, their information does not disappear. Kashmir Hill of Forbes.com states, "When you delete your account, it doesn't delete everything you've ever done on the site. Any messages you've written, for example, stay in your friends' inboxes" (Hill, Facebook Privacy Policy Change). This translates to photos as well.

There are two sides to every issue:

1. Facebook's changes are a positive approach to marketing and will bring users relevant information to enable convenient shopping/opportunities around the Web.
2. Facebook is infringing on personal rights to privacy by exploiting personal information to outside parties who in turn exploit users.

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