

Hey Siri, Google and Alexa—enough with the snooping

August 26 2019, by Jefferson Graham, Usa Today



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Hey, Google, enough is enough already.

Google was caught having contractors listening in to our conversations from its [personal assistant](#), which sounds bad until you realize Google wasn't alone in this. Apple and Facebook were doing the same thing. And this week, Microsoft got stung by Vice's Motherboard, and now admits it, too, listens.

The companies, which also include Amazon, have said they do this on a limited basis to learn and make their assistants better. Every time we say "Hey, Google," our query is being recorded and stored. Ditto for Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Facebook Messenger and Microsoft's Cortana.

Consumers are "trading privacy for convenience," says Bret Kinsella, the editor of the Voicebot.ai blog, which tracks voice computing. "The likelihood of something they're saying at home being picked up is low."

But it happens. And it's our job, if we're uncomfortable with the practice, to delete the recordings and change our settings to stop the snooping. Because by default, the companies are set to monitor, leaving it to us to have to hunt and peck and stop them in their tracks.

Amazon

Unlike the other companies, the e-tailer is actually upfront and couldn't be more clear about how it uses humans to listen to our recordings made with the many Amazon Echo speakers, Fire TV streaming devices and via the Alexa smartphone app, once we say the Alexa "wake word." Our

queries "may be used to develop new features and manually reviewed to help improve our services," Amazon says.

To get Amazon to stop having Alexa have humans listen to you, you need to open the Alexa smartphone app, where Amazon gives you the option to turn it off. Just say no. (Go to Settings, Alexa Privacy and select "Manage How your data Improves Alexa.")

It's within the app settings (under Review Voice History) that you can also enable "deletion by voice," to say, "Alexa, delete what I just said," or "Alexa, delete everything I said today" and have the recordings erased. Make sure your date range under "Review Voice History" is clicked to "all history," and you'll see an option to "delete all recordings."

What you won't see is an option for Amazon to stop recording you at all. Amazon doesn't offer the ability to stop the e-tailer from recording and storing your queries and offered no explanation for why it doesn't offer an opt-out to decline the practice.

Google

The Google Assistant isn't only for the Google Home speaker, but it's also used on Android and iOS phones to pose questions and get information.

Google's defense for listening in to you: "We partner with language experts around the world who understand the nuances and accents of a specific language," and so It records your voice and audio "to improve speech recognition."

You can disable Google from listening to you in the same settings section that stops Google from monitoring your every move for Google Maps, which tracks you even if the app isn't opened.

When you click it off, Google will beg you not to, saying this "may limit or disable more personalized experiences across Google services. For example, Google may not understand you when you say "OK, Google" to speak to your Assistant."

And it reminds you that turning off the setting won't delete any of the past data Google recorded. To get rid of those, you'll need to go to [google.com](https://www.google.com/activity) target="_blank">myactivity.[google.com](https://www.google.com/activity) .

Don't forget once there to click Web and App Activity and "Choose to Delete Automatically," to stop Google from continuing the recordings.

Apple

Apple's Siri is the most widely used personal assistant, as default on over 1 billion iPhones, Apple Watches and the HomePod speaker. The iPhone maker has been outspoken in its support of personal privacy, saying it's not a data hog like Google and Facebook that want to track your every move for selling targeted ads.

But according to The Guardian, Apple, too, was listening in to our chats with Siri. Apple was paying contractors to do the job, and the publication learned of personal information like doctor's appointments and addresses being noted. In response, Apple said it would suspend monitoring operations and would grace us with a "future software update," which will let users choose whether to participate in the human monitoring program.

In other words, if you don't like it, you'll have to know to go into Settings and stop Apple from the practice. Be assured readers that we'll be back with a how-to once the update is released.

Kinsella says some 77 million smart speakers are in use today in the

United States.

Facebook

Audio messages between two private parties via the Facebook Messenger app were transcribed by contractors working for the social network, per a Bloomberg report. Yes, you can make calls for free, but even if you say you're not interested in being recorded, the other party can agree to be snooped and have Facebook turn on the record button.

Facebook now says it has paused the transcribing.

How to stop Facebook from doing this, in case it resumes again? The Messenger app doesn't have a settings section, so you'll have to do it in the settings section of your phone. What you want to do: Turn off microphone access. In other words, don't make calls with Facebook Messenger.

In Apple iOS, go to Settings, scroll down to the Facebook app and unclick microphone. On Android phones, open settings, click "Apps & notifications," find the Facebook Messenger app, look for Permissions, click Microphone, and chose Deny.

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Citation: Hey Siri, Google and Alexa—enough with the snooping (2019, August 26) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-08-hey-siri-google-alexaenough-snooping.html>

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