

Why you're receiving all those privacy update emails

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You knew that every time you went online and typed away, companies took every one of your inputs to study, market and share with others.

But did you really realize the extent of it?

A new California law, going into effect in January, has produced an

avalanche of privacy law updates this week, no doubt flooding your inbox. The changes affect nearly everyone, since all the companies do business in California.

Here's how Jessica Guynn described the law, in her preview piece this week. The California Consumer Privacy Act "will grant consumers the right to see the personal information that companies collect about them and stop them from selling it."

The only hitch, as you'll be able to tell from reading the privacy updates that went out, is this: the process of communicating with the companies and requesting them to stop will not be easy. And it won't magically stop the firms from grabbing your info and profiting from it.

Have you taken a look at the privacy updates?

I'm assuming you didn't. Most people don't. So I did.

The e-mails usually say something like this, per magazine publisher Condé Nast. "We've updated our Privacy Policy to include more details about the data we collect, how we use it and what your rights are regarding how data is used."

Bottom line: Condé Nast (like most everyone else) saves every keystroke generated onto websites like TheNew Yorker, Vanity Fair and Wired, and lets me opt out by sending an e-mail to the complaint department.

What Condé Nast (and most other sites) pick up: your name, postal address, ZIP code, [email address](#), telephone number, unique online identifier, computer IP address and more.

On top of that add in your gender, marital status, nationality, and country of origin, purchase history, website activity, geolocation data,

occupation, employment history and academic record. Conde Nast says it doesn't obtain biometric or financial account information, government-issued ID numbers like Social Security and drivers' license numbers, but "we may do so when such Personal Information is necessary to offer you certain services."

Thanks Condé Nast!

The magazine publisher says it acquires much of the info from us when we enter contests, answer surveys or register for an account. It admits it rents, sells and shares our information to list buyers, clients and "data coops," which are pooled databases shared by publishers.

If you don't want Condé Nast sharing your info, you need to send in an e-mail asking to be let free, to the address privacy_administration@condenast.com

That one's actually responsive to consumers. At TV streamer Hulu, which runs targeted TV commercials to you in exchange for one of the lowest monthly streaming fees (\$5.99), you're going to put in some major work and the end result probably won't be what you wanted.

Hulu says it shares collection information with business partners, advertisers, companies that assist with payment processing, analytics and management companies.

What you watch on the service gets shared, "even if you have not consented" per Hulu and you can opt-out by tweaking your settings.

But there's a big "but" coming.

As a California resident, you now have the right to request the data that Hulu collects, but you'll have to send a snail mail letter to Hulu's physical

address in Santa Monica. You also have the right to request the deletion of the data, but it's a Catch-22. Do so, says Hulu, and that will require "the cancellation and deletion of your account which, upon completion, cannot be undone."

So much for that. But at least you now have a physical address to send your complaint letters to.

Now, if we could only get the states to stop selling our [personal information](#) in the first place to data brokers (i.e. my recent piece on people search engines) we might just have a happier new year.

Finally, the biggest tech companies, Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook, already have (hidden) sections of their websites (and apps) that let you discover the info they have kept on you, look at it, and request its deletion.

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