

# Google updates terms in plain language after EU scrutiny

February 20 2020, by Rachel Lerman

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In a Sept. 24, 2019 file photo, sign is shown on a Google building at their campus in Mountain View, Calif. Google is attempting to make sure people know exactly what they're signing up for when they use its online services, though it will still mean reading a lengthy document. The company updated its Terms of Service on Thursday, —it's largest update to the general use contract since 2012—in response to a pair of court orders in Europe. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

Google is attempting to make sure people know exactly what they're signing up for when they use its online services—though that will still mean reading a lengthy document.

The company updated its terms of service on Thursday—its largest update to the general use contract since 2012—in response to a pair of court orders in Europe.

As Britain leaves the European Union, Google also announced that U.K. customers will now legally be part of its main U.S. operations rather than a separate European center based in Ireland. The company says the move won't change how U.K. customers' data is protected or stored. U.K. officials have said they will still abide by the EU privacy rules, called GDPR, for now.

Google has been updating its policies and tweaking what's allowed on its services as scrutiny of the tech industry heats up in the U.S. and Europe. Google, Facebook, Twitter and other digital companies have been under a spotlight as regulators and consumers examine just how much the companies know about their users and what they do with that information.

Facebook updated its terms of service last year to clarify how it makes money from user data.

Google says it hasn't changed anything significant in the document, but rather used plain language to describe who can use its products and what people can post online.

"Broadly speaking, we give you permission to use our services if you agree to follow these terms, which reflect how Google's business works and how we earn money," the document reads.

The new document is now about 2,000 words longer than it was before, in part because Google included a list of definitions and expanded it to cover Google Drive and Chrome. The new terms take effect in March.

Google's privacy policy is separate and was substantially updated in 2018 after Europe enacted broad-reaching privacy laws.

The company also updated its "About Google" page to explain how it makes money from selling advertisements, often informed by the vast amount of customer information it collects.

As for U.K. customers, the switch to U.S. operations restores Google's practice prior to last year. Google had switched U.K. and other European customers to Ireland last year as the GDPR privacy law took effect.

The switch back is likely to avoid having a third country's law apply to U.K. data, said Mike Chapple, a professor of information technology at the University of Notre Dame.

"Google is one of the first companies that's trying to untangle this messy legal aftermath of Brexit," he said.

If it left U.K. customers to Ireland, Google could risk "double-jeopardy for fines and other sanctions" in the case of any breach because it would be subject to both U.K. and EU laws, said Michael Veale, a lecturer at University College London.

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