

Apple now requires court orders in U.S. to access push notification data

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People walk by an Apple store Oct. 20, 2023, in Denver. Apple is now requiring that U.S. law enforcement agencies obtain a court order for information on its customers' push notifications — the alerts iPhone apps send users that can reveal a lot about their online activity. Credit: AP Photo/Brittany Peterson, File

Apple is now requiring that U.S. law enforcement agencies obtain a

court order for information on its customers' push notifications, the alerts that iPhone apps send users that can reveal a lot about their online activity.

Push notifications alert smartphone users to breaking news alerts, incoming messages, weather bulletins and other content.

The [policy shift](#) was not formally announced but rather appeared in an updated version of Apple's [law enforcement guidelines posted online](#). Apple's main competitor in [mobile operating systems](#), Google, already had such a policy in place for its Android system.

The Cupertino, California, company did not immediately respond to questions about it.

The privacy-enhancing policy was added following [last week's disclosure](#) by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden that his office had received a tip last year that [government agencies](#) in foreign countries were demanding smartphone push notification data from both Google and Apple.

"Apple and Google are in a unique position to facilitate government surveillance of how users are using particular apps," Wyden wrote Attorney General Merrick Garland on Dec. 6. Because servers at both companies process app data, they receive metadata associated with individual phones that could betray information potentially prejudicial to users.

Wyden did not identify the governments involved.

Google spokesman Matt Bryant said the company has always "required a [court order](#)" to compel disclosure of data associated with push notifications.

As for disclosure of such data when it is requested by a [foreign government](#), Bryant said that would depend "on applicable law, which vary by region" and [other considerations](#) including international norms

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