

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Bad Google – Sit... Stay...

Google just did the stupid security thing to a few hundred million people. And most of them will do nothing about it because it requires a bit of effort and frankly, likely because they don't care or think about it. But that specific thing is not what this article is about. It's about Facebook long ago and still today, and after them, most all the major players in anything large-scale.

The stupid security thing

The specific stupid security thing they just did was to create a new default to allow anyone attending any google meet that was recorded to be able to download any recordings and transcripts without explicit permission of the meeting owner. They emailed all the owners of domains to let them know they have 30 days to stop this or they will be subject to it, making an extra few minutes work for some millions of people, or in other words, a few million minutes of work, or about 83,000 systems administrator hours = about \$3B (at \$40/hr) of unnecessary work NOT INCLUDING the decision-making time that should be spent by decision-makers in selecting the proper policy in this regard.

But fear not... very few will likely actually do this and merely discover later that they have lost control over information that could lead to law suits, firings, discontent, and so forth. And what's a few billion dollars of your time and money to Google anyway, it's not their money.

The actual issues

Now to the actual (security) issues. I say security, but most folks misunderstand it as having something to do with privacy, or secrecy, and the more sophisticated among the so-called security community will say "CIA"; Confidentiality, Integrity, Availability (note this is also in the wrong order or importance in most cases, but it sticks in peoples' minds...).

- **Default deny:** Yes, back to the old school concept that granting permission is potentially more consequential than allowing it, so the default should be deny and the entity should have to make the conscious decision to allow it. Or is it...
- **Backward compatible:** When doing something new, it should not stop things from operating that operated before and in the same manner as they acted before. Or is it...
- **Fail Safe:** Yes, the failure mode (of not doing anything to the contrary in time) should be the mode that does the least harm – the safer one.
- **Liability:** I mentioned this briefly above, but frankly, creating liability for your customers is a bad idea, and forcing them to make wasteful decisions is as well.
- **Legality:** In a recent article I pointed out that providing 3rd parties with recordings (or even making them) without permission is illegal in many jurisdictions. An exception in many/most is with notice for maintenance purposes. But other laws may apply as well, and inherently trusting all parties to keep confidential when giving copies...
- **Others?** I'm sure there are, but this is enough for now.

Not the first or only time

Of course not only does Google do this, for example to push their AI on everyone recently, but so do most other large entities. And I am not talking about just recordings of meetings. I am talking about these sorts of changes to produce what the company wants often to the detriment of users, and often in direct conflict with the users' previous expressed will.

Long ago, Facebook started to introduce new 'privacy' 'options'. I quote both because these 'options' were essentially always default allow sharing replacing previous options that users had set to deny sharing. By creating a new option and deprecating the old one, they effectively wore down their users to the point where users did not get what they wanted and Facebook got what they wanted. This has continued as a trend from then forward.

One of the most pernicious ways this spreads is through the 3rd party consent agreements that keep changing 3rd party providers, sometimes with notice, but never with a choice other than no longer using the company services. And frankly, since they essentially all do this, changing providers does not benefit you at all, and even with relatively efficient take-out capabilities, changing providers is very time consuming and expensive in most cases.

Again, my concern is not about any one company or any one policy or provider. It is about an industry that has become so large and embedded that it is increasingly difficult to stop, and as we have seen over history, power corrupts.

Governance is the issue and decision-making is the core

I just released a public (free to use) version of JDM (Judgment and Decision-Making) that is about deciding which decision-making process to use to make which decision. Unlike Decider, which has been on the market (not free) for some time and that is focused on making specific types of decisions, JDM is a meta-framework. The only thing it can help you decide is how to make decisions about other things. (All.Net select JDM from the menu)

The reason I bring it up is because I generally see more and more companies paying less and less attention to how they make decisions and making bad decisions because they are not using the right decision-making process for the type of decision they are making. I don't mean to say that I know the right way for you to make your own decisions, but rather, that certain types of decisions are best made using specific methods. For example, having a group discussion to decide whether to hit the brakes as your car approaches a cliff is probably the wrong approach. Finding the right approach and creating structure around how you make decisions, especially when they have higher consequences and when you are going to make more than one similar decision going forward, is a key role of good governance.

Conclusions

I would like to suggest fines equal to the expected costs to all people having to make decisions and changes PLUS remuneration for time spent to all those who spent it. It would support more reasonable decision-making by the folks running the monster corporate data collection and exploitation companies. But that would not likely work, because, among other things, I don't have any influence at all over what the relevant decision-makers do. So my real conclusion is that the more successful long-term companies will likely make better decisions about these sorts of things, and my hope is that you will be one of those decision-makers at one of those companies and think about the implications of these decisions a bit more.