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FAQ: Google's new privacy policy

By [Hayley Tsukayama](#),

Google announced Tuesday that it will [integrate users' information](#) across Gmail, YouTube, search and 57 other Google services.

Google privacy director Alma Whitten, who explained the changes in a company blog post Tuesday afternoon, said the company will “treat you as a single user across all our products, which will mean a simpler, more intuitive Google experience.”

What is Google doing?: In a nutshell, Google is taking information from almost all of your Google services — including Gmail, Picasa, YouTube and search — and integrating the data so that they can learn more about you. Google Books, Google Wallet and Google Chrome will retain their own additional policies, partly for legal reasons, but Google could still integrate data from these services.

What kind of information are they collecting and integrating?:

Google collects and can integrate almost anything that's already in the Google ecosystem: calendar appointments, location data, search preferences, contacts, personal habits based on Gmail chatter, device information and search queries, to name a few.

Can they do that?: Well, under the company's current privacy policies for some of its properties, Google says it can “combine the information you submit under your account with information from other Google services or third parties in order to provide you with a better experience and to improve the quality of our services.” The privacy policies for YouTube and search history, however, did not have such language. Now they do and the company has now made its ability to combine information across these and its other services more explicit.

Why is Google doing this?: Google says it will be able to do a lot more “cool things” when it combines information across products. There's “so much more that Google can do to help you” if you share your information with them.

Give me an example.: From Whitten's blog post: Google will be able to “provide

reminders that you're going to be late for a meeting based on your location, your calendar and an understanding of what traffic is like that day.”

Interesting. Tell me more: Also from Whitten: Google will be able to “ensure that our spelling suggestions, even for your friends' names, are accurate because you've typed them before.”

When do the changes take effect?: March 1.

Can I opt-out?: No.

So what do I do if I don't like the policy?: You can close your account. Google has provided information on how to take all of your personal information off of Google by closing your Google Account, which would erase your Gmail, Google+ and other accounts.

But I have a lot of data saved on Gmail/Picasa/etc...: Google says it is committed to “data liberation” and that it will allow you to take your information elsewhere if you want to. The company said it would provide directions on how to do this in the help sections for its various services.

I don't have a Google Account, but use Google search. Am I affected?: No. The new policy only applies to people who have a Google Account linked to services such as Gmail, Picasa or YouTube and are signed in.

What if I have account but am not signed in?: Google can only integrate your information if you are signed in. For example, if you're signed in to your Gmail account on one tab, and then decide to look up a clip on YouTube on another tab without signing out of your e-mail, the data will be integrated. If you sign out or look up a YouTube clip on a different browser, the data won't be integrated.

I have an Android phone. How does this affect me?: Because you have to sign in to your Google account to do anything except for browse the Web and make phone calls, Google will be able to track practically anything you do on your phone using Google services.

What about if I have an iPhone/Blackberry/Windows 8 phone?: Google's new privacy policy doesn't get into the specifics of what it can collect on different platforms and whether this changes if you download a Google app or if you access Gmail, for instance, on your phone's browser or competitor's app. But it does say that if you sign into Google services, Google will be able to collect information about your device and usage.

Can you be more specific about the type of information Google will be able to collect on mobile devices?

The company's new privacy policy allows the company to collect a great deal of data: Your device hardware model, operating system version, unique device identifiers and mobile network information. Google says it may associate your device identifiers or phone number with your Google Account. Details of how you use the service, such as search queries. Telephony log information like time and date of calls, duration of calls. IP addresses. Cookies that may "uniquely identify your browser or your Google Account." Google was already collecting this information under its old privacy policy but is making it more explicit that it can marry the mobile data with other information so they can find out things like the location you were in when you ran a particular search query.

What do privacy advocates have to say about the new policy?: Privacy advocates are already saying that Google's new policy will be a surprise to many users.

"There is no way anyone expected this," Jeffrey Chester, executive director of the privacy advocacy group Center for Digital Democracy, told [The Washington Post's Cecilia Kang](#). "There is no way a user can comprehend the implication of Google collecting across platforms for information about your health, political opinions and financial concerns."

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass), the co-chair of the Congressional Privacy Caucus told The Post that he had issues with Google's decision to mandate the sharing between services. "It is imperative that users will be able to decide whether they want their information shared across the spectrum of Google's offerings."

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