

Facebook, MySpace caught releasing user data



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In a seemingly never-ending string of damaging disclosures about its [users' privacy concerns](#), Facebook has reportedly been releasing user data to ad companies that hadn't even asked for the info.

Facebook isn't alone this time: rival social-media site MySpace has also been called out in Friday's [Wall Street Journal report](#) by Emily Steel and Jessica E. Vascellaro — together with the content-sharing sites Livejournal and Digg.

The report says that the companies have delivered user data to major online advertising companies such as Google's DoubleClick and Yahoo!'s Right Media, despite explicit pledges to protect such information. The released material includes user names and ID numbers, together with data that could be used to accumulate a host of additional information on individual users, such as where they live, their names, occupations, incomes and places of employment.

As [Steel and Vascellaro](#) write:

"Across the Web, it's common for advertisers to receive the address of the page from which a user clicked on an ad. Usually, they receive nothing more about the user than an unintelligible string of letters and numbers that can't be traced back to an individual. With social networking sites, however, those addresses typically include user names that could direct advertisers back to a profile page full of personal information. In some cases, user names are people's real names."

Representatives of both DoubleClick and Right Media told the Journal reporters that they were unaware they were receiving such data — and stressed that they hadn't tried to make use of any of it.

After the Journal contacted Facebook, the company announced a change in software to prevent transmission of the identifying code, the Journal said. MySpace announced that it's in the process of adopting the same user protections. Digg, Livejournal and other sites named in

the report are apparently holding off on enhancing privacy safeguards because they don't require users to register with real names.

Still, the report is another black eye for Facebook, which has already caused such an uproar that four U.S. senators — not exactly your typical Web activists — [entered the fray](#) over the company's user privacy standards. Meanwhile, Facebook is generating plenty of bad PR all by itself, with an executive's backlash-provoking [Q&A at the New York Times](#) and recent reports that users who posted comments critical of founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg have seen their [profiles mysteriously deleted](#).

These episodes may well explain the company's other piece of bad news this week: a poll disclosing that [60 percent of Facebook users](#) have considered deleting their accounts because of qualms about the site's privacy policy.

— Brett Michael Dykes is a national affairs writer for Yahoo! News.

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