FTC Offers Privacy Guidelines for Mobile Industry

The Associated Press

The Federal Trade Commission is offering recommendations for companies in the expanding mobile industry like Amazon.com and Apple Inc. on how to protect users' privacy.

In a report published Friday, the FTC outlines guidelines that include advising companies to get people's consent before using technology to track shoppers' locations, consider offering a "do not track" mechanism for smart phone users; and developing icons that show the transmission of user data.

For app developers, the FTC recommends they have a privacy policy and to make sure it is easily accessible through app stores. The agency also urges app developers to consider participating in self-regulatory programs, trade associations and industry organizations which it said can provide guidance on how to make uniform privacy disclosures.

"The mobile world is expanding and innovating at breathtaking speed, allowing consumers to do things that would have been hard to imagine only a few years ago," said FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz in a statement. "These practices will help to safeguard consumer privacy and build trust in the mobile marketplace, ensuring that the market can continue to thrive."

The guidelines come amid an explosive growth of mobile phones. Consumers are taking advantage of the devices to find the nearest restaurant, check weather reports or connect with friends. But people are increasingly concerned about their privacy as companies aim to use the personal data collected on the phones to better market to them.

The report is based on the agency's enforcement and policy experience with mobile issues and a May 2012 FTC workshop, which brought together representatives from industry, trade associations, academia, and consumer privacy groups to explore privacy disclosures on mobile devices.

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