

Beat: Technology

U.S. allows Internet giants to disclose more data on gov;t spying

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USPA News - The U.S. Department of Justice on Monday settled a lawsuit with major U.S. technology companies that will allow them to release more information about government spying requests for customer data, the latest fallout from Edward Snowden's leaks regarding NSA surveillance programs. Last summer, social networking website Facebook, Internet giant Google, technology giant Microsoft, and professional networking website LinkedIn sued the U.S. government in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, asking for permission to disclose the number of spying requests they receive and how many of them they were required to honor.

The four companies withdrew their legal motions last Friday under the new deal disclosed on Monday that will not only allow them to publish details regarding government requests for general customer data and communications, but also allows them to reveal how many accounts were affected. "We filed our lawsuits because we believe that the public has a right to know about the volume and types of national security requests we receive," the companies said in a joint statement. "We're pleased the Department of Justice has agreed that we and other providers can disclose this information. While this is a very positive step, we'll continue to encourage Congress to take additional steps to address all of the reforms we believe are needed." The Justice Department's filing allows more detailed disclosures about the number of national security orders and requests issued to communications providers, the number of customer accounts targeted under those orders and requests, and the underlying legal authorities. Through these new reporting methods, communications providers will be permitted to disclose more information than ever before to their customers. The deal, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said, emphasizes the government's commitment to making intelligence activities more transparent. "This action was directed by the President earlier this month in his speech on intelligence reforms," they said in a joint statement. "While this aggregate data was properly classified until today, the office of the Director of National Intelligence, in consultation with other departments and agencies, has determined that the public interest in disclosing this information now outweighs the national security concerns that required its classification."

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