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# Beware Big Tech's Data Privacy Doublespeak

Posted by [Derek A. Lackey, Editor](#) / January 08, 2019

Just a couple months ago, IBM CEO Ginni Rometty inveighed against big tech companies abusing peoples data at a privacy conference in Brussels. She cited a trust crisis, ascribing its origins to the irresponsible handling of personal data by a few dominant consumer-facing platforms. Rometty did not have to identify the subjects of her criticism by name, Facebook no doubt among them, for people to understand her point.

Now IBM finds itself uncomfortably lumped in with the offenders. The office of the city attorney of Los Angeles has filed suit against an IBM subsidiary for allegedly deceiving users about the business units questionable data privacy practices, as the lawsuit states. The city's complaint follows a recent investigation by the New York Times which drew attention to consumer data exploitation by The Weather Channel app, a forecasting service owned by The Weather Company, whose assets IBM bought for a reported \$2 billion in 2015. (It is perhaps worth noting that David Kenny, former CEO of The Weather Company and later head of IBM's artificial intelligence business, recently became CEO of Nielsen, the world's largest market research company.)

Here's the heart of the controversy: When The Weather Channel app requests permission to access a user's location, it says it requires the information to offer personalized local weather data, alerts and forecasts. The app's automatic pop-up box fails to mention that The Weather Company reserves the right to sell people's geolocation data to advertisers and other third parties, like hedge funds, for a profit. That information is instead tucked away in a separate, nearly 10,000-word privacy policy, which one must seek out.

IBM maintains that its subsidiary has done no wrong. In response to the lawsuit, Saswato Das, an IBM spokesperson, said in a statement emailed to Fortune that The Weather Company has always been transparent with use of location data; the disclosures are fully appropriate, and we will defend them vigorously.

That's one view. Another view is that The Weather Company breached people's trust in a way that recalls the transgressions of rival tech companies transgressions Rometty herself criticized.

In truth...

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