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BIG TECH COMPANY ADMITS IT'S LISTENING TO YOU

We've all suspected our devices are listening to us. The tech community has largely denied listening without our permission. In fact, in 2017, Facebook had to publicly deny that it listens to its users (that's what they use location services and ad tracking for). But Cox Media Group (CMG), a multibillion-dollar media empire that owns and operates TV and radio stations worldwide, admitted it's doing just that.

HOW ARE THEY DOING IT?

404 Media gathered published marketing information from CMG and determined that it uses AI to identify conversations via smart devices – collecting information about our spending behaviors, interests and how we spend our time – to deliver ads to us. CMG calls it “Active Listening.” Though any mention of CMG's Active Listening platform has been removed from its website, the archived information is still accessible.

A document published by CMG's VP of digital strategy said, “Yes, our phones

are listening to us,” and “CMG has tech capabilities to use to your business advantage.” For example, it claimed to use audio data to create detailed customer profiles, which benefits consumers (fewer irrelevant ads) and businesses (targeted marketing). Still, no one knows *exactly* how they do it, technically speaking. Would it still adhere to safety restrictions imposed by companies like Apple that prevent other companies from listening to its devices? No one knows.

CMG later published a statement saying, “CMG businesses do not listen to any conversations or have access to anything beyond a third-party aggregated, anonymized and fully encrypted data set that can be used for ad placement. We regret any confusion...”

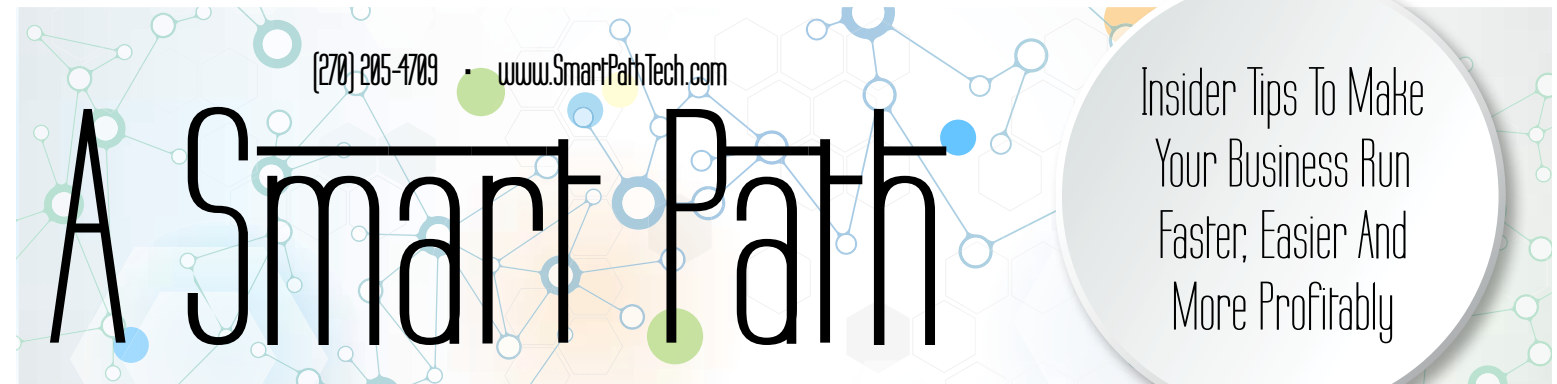
Business Insider states, “It's important to note that it's not clear whether this technology and marketing is actually

happening.” Nevertheless, this incident is an important reminder to refresh your privacy settings and pay attention to the real possibilities of companies listening in.

ADJUST YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS NOW

Although tech leaders like Google and Apple have policies around how and when they listen to you, fake apps and shady companies do not. Any app with access to your microphone could listen to your most private conversations.

Take a moment and really look at the permissions you've given your apps. If it's not essential, it's better to revoke that microphone access in your device's settings. Another smart move is to tweak your settings so that an app can only use the microphone while you're actively using it. Finally, never download apps unless you know how, when and why they collect data about you, especially voice data.



What's New

Did you get a little excited when Punxsutawney Phil predicted an early spring? Before you start making plans for those summer vacations, make sure your technology is prepared to keep your business efficient and profitable, even in your absence. Schedule a meeting with us so we can evaluate the specific needs of your company and plan for your long-term growth. We can help you optimize your equipment and discuss any needed upgrades. Even when you are away, we monitor your systems 24/7! Our ITWorks Remote Solutions allow access from anywhere and our Email Management Program allows filtering of spam, malware, and viruses. Let's do our homework now, so you can rest assured later, knowing your company is in good hands!



-Willie

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Our Mission:

“To provide top-of-the-line IT services in a profitable manner and enable our employees to use those profits to do good in our community and in the world.”



TRUST IS THE NEW CURRENCY – *How Wealthy Are You?*

Today, most business transactions – whether buying shampoo or tonight's dinner – are faceless. That's why in our digital world, trust is the new currency. This shift in consumer behavior, sometimes called the “trust economy,” is more than the quality of products or services you offer; it's about constructing a bedrock of reliability and transparency so customers choose you over competitors.

“Trust keeps society running. Even the most trivial interactions rely on small acts of trust,” the *Economist* reported. This isn't lost on company leaders either. PwC's 25th Annual Global CEO Survey reported that behind industry conditions, consumer trust is the *most important* predictor of a company's past and future financial performance.

However, trust is increasingly difficult to earn. Thanks to the recent emergence of AI, frequent mishandling of personal data by companies and relentless cyber-attacks, customers are more skeptical than ever. As product and service providers, PwC points out that we are constantly evaluated by our customers on whether or not we are “forces for good in society.” Make one slipup and that trust is gone, perhaps for good.

How you handle data and use technology to influence your customers' experience will decide your fate in the trust economy. Prioritize the most important drivers of trust – empathy, reliability and integrity – and grow your customer loyalty this year and in the years to come.

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