

# Firefox Can Sell Your Data

## On the ethics of Mozilla's privacy policy change

On the 27th of February 2025, Mozilla formalized their Terms of Use, updated their Privacy Policy, and propagated these changes to their FAQs. I concluded this action was unethical, being most disappointed with the **removal of their promise to never sell user data** for profit. In this essay I will dissect Mozilla's actions through the lens of my personal deontological ethics and recommend my personal response to Mozilla's actions. Also, I will briefly consider utilitarianism as a consequentialist ethical system, partially justifying Mozilla. Let's begin.

On February 25th 2025 a commit was made to Mozilla's bedrock repo concerning Firefox. In this commit the following text was *removed*:

“Does Firefox sell your personal data?”

“Nope. Never have, never will. ... Firefox products are designed to protect your privacy. That's a promise.”<sup>1</sup>

From my deontological ethical standpoint, I consider this action intrinsically immoral. The premises for this statement are: That promises ought not to be broken without both parties consenting; Mozilla promised to never sell user data; Mozilla reneged this promise; Mozilla reneged without community consent. The third and fourth premise is most debatable. Personally I felt betrayed instead of informed, and some of the internet shared that opinion<sup>2</sup>. Hence, I will assume that the community of Firefox users did not consent or agree to Mozilla reneging their promise. Mozilla also released a blog post undermining my third premise: “... in some places, the LEGAL definition of “sale of data” is broad and evolving,” (Varma, 2025) as a justification for the removal of the “blanket” claim to never sell data.

The correct response to this is community concern and accountability through (nonviolent) sharing of opinions, online and offline, for the betterment of Mozilla and treatment of end users as *ends* rather than just means for more data to sell. Concerning the data Mozilla currently collects according to their privacy policy, it “... may be shared with our partners on a de-identified and/or aggregated basis,” (Firefox Privacy Notice, 2025) indicating Mozilla continues to ethically use and share user data. I consider this sharing of information ethical as my individual identity is never disclosed, and no third-party could track me through Mozilla's legal disclosures.

A competing ethical standpoint is utilitarianism. The wider context for Mozilla's actions probably related to economic pressure from Google's DOJ court case, which threatened to cut off a large portion of royalties that still fund Mozilla. Specially, **Mozilla received USD \$495 million from royalties** out of their total income of USD \$653 million in 2024, **primarily from Google** paying for their search engine to be the default. I take as a premise Mozilla's continued operation is a net good due to their amazing developer contributions, and a utilitarian system of ethics would factor this into any moral judgements on Mozilla's actions. Since economics is not my area of expertise, however, I conservatively consider this justification weak.

In conclusion, Mozilla's removal of their promise to never sell user data I consider intrinsically immoral. This is primarily from my personal deontological normative ethics, but an economic argument could still be made for the vindication of Mozilla from a utilitarian perspective. Either way, Mozilla's data sharing I still consider ethical due to their principle of never identifying their customers.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://github.com/mozilla/bedrock/commit/d459addab846d8144b61939b7f4310eb80c5470e?diff=unified#diff-a24e74e4595fa85440a2f4e7e5dcfe68aba6e1e593aef05a2d35581a91423847>

<sup>2</sup> Two independent articles: <https://www.zdnet.com/article/the-firefox-i-loved-is-gone-how-to-protect-your-privacy-on-it-now/> and [https://www.theregister.com/2025/03/02/mozilla\\_introduces\\_terms\\_of\\_use/](https://www.theregister.com/2025/03/02/mozilla_introduces_terms_of_use/)