

**FORTUNE**

## **Google Still Doesn't Care About Your Privacy**



A man rides a bike passed a Google sign and logo at the Googleplex in Menlo Park, California on November 4, 2016.  
JOSH EDELSON/AFP/Getty Images

By **JOSEPH TUROW** June 28, 2017

The other morning I looked at the pudgy personal assistant that sits on my kitchen counter and asked, “Hey, Google: Please read me the [Google](#) privacy policy.” It responded, “Sorry; I don’t understand.”

It may sound as if the Google gnome made a mistake. But I suspect the truth is that Google doesn’t want us consumers to know how much information it is constantly

collecting.

Take the company's decision this week to stop personalizing Gmail ads based on scanning of words in email messages. It may sound like substantial change, but it's mostly a smokescreen. First, it's important to note that it came about after [business voiced concern](#) that Google would sweep up sensitive information from their correspondences—not because of consumer outcry.

Second, ads will remain, but “[in line with how we personalize ads for other Google products.](#)” That's a cover-up for saying that heavy-duty data gathering will continue in all the Google products you use that are not Gmail. Google Analytics, for example, is one of the ways Google follows virtually everyone everywhere. Google's apps allow it to collect your phone number and physical location, and your searches help it to create sophisticated data profiles about you. This then helps marketers target you with specific advertisements.

All this and much more takes place without your knowledge; some of it isn't even in Google's privacy policy. But let's say that unlike Google Home, you actually do read Google's privacy policy—which research shows [most of us don't](#). At the very start, the marketing giant hits you with the deal: By giving up information you allow the company “to show you more relevant search results and ads, to help you connect with people or to make sharing with others [quicker and easier](#).”

Yet it's not really a fair trade. [Most people](#) have [little understanding](#) of what they're actually agreeing to [give up](#). A 2015 national survey my colleagues and I conducted showed that Americans [don't buy the tradeoff idea](#). It also revealed that 58% of Americans are resigned to what's taking place. They don't want companies like Google to have control over their data, but they've come to believe they don't have a choice.

The implications of this are profound. Google's activities may affect the ads you see, the deals you are exposed to, the purchases you make, the discounts you receive, the

entertainment and news you see, and your very sense that surveillance is natural. Google is only one of a gaggle of large companies involved in these sorts of activities while seemingly hoping we don't understand and are too resigned to push back.

*Joseph Turow is the Robert Lewis Shayon professor of communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. His new book is [The Aisles Eyes](#): How Retailers Track Your Shopping, Strip Your Privacy, and Define Your Power.*