

Government Orders Google to Track Anyone Using Certain Names, Addresses, and Phone Numbers

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An accidentally unsealed court document showed that the US government is reportedly secretly issuing “keyboard warrants” for Google to provide user data on anyone typing in certain search terms. Fears have been raised over the possibility that innocent online users could get caught up in serious crime investigations at a greater frequency than previously thought. It is not publicly disclosed how much users’ data is sent to the government and what the extent of the warrant requests are. This technique threatens First Amendment interests and will inevitably sweep up innocent people. Police are doing this in secret. -GEG

The U.S. government is reportedly secretly issuing warrants for Google to provide user data on anyone typing in certain search terms, raising fears that innocent online users could get caught up in serious crime investigations at a greater frequency than previously thought.

In an attempt to track down criminals, federal investigators have started using new “keyword warrants” and used them to ask Google to provide them information on anyone who searched a victim’s name or their address during a particular year, an accidentally unsealed court document that [Forbes found](#) shows.

Google has to respond to thousands of warrant orders each year, but the keyword warrants

are a relatively new strategy used by the government and are controversial.

“Trawling through Google’s search history database enables police to identify people merely based on what they might have been thinking about, for whatever reason, at some point in the past,” Jennifer Granick, surveillance and cybersecurity counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union, told Forbes.

“This never-before-possible technique threatens First Amendment interests and will inevitably sweep up innocent people, especially if the keyword terms are not unique and the time frame not precise. To make matters worse, police are currently doing this in secret, which insulates the practice from public debate and regulation,” she added.

The government said that the scope of the warrants is limited to avoid implicating innocent people who happen to search for certain terms, but it’s not publicly disclosed how many users’ data are sent to the government and what the extent of the warrant requests are.

Google has defended its decision to respond to the warrants and said it protects users when doing so.

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