

# Facebook Suspends Tens of Thousands of Apps Over Privacy Concerns

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The social media giant's announcement is short on specifics about which third parties may have abused consumer data By Allen St. John September 21, 2019 253 SHARES



Facebook says it has suspended tens of thousands of apps from its platform, as part of an extended investigation stemming from the [Cambridge Analytica scandal](#) in which personal data from 87 million Facebook users was collected and used by a political consulting firm without their knowledge.

According to a company [blog post](#), most of the apps, which users would encounter inside Facebook, were created by 400 third-party developers. The post, signed by Ime Archibong, Facebook's VP of product partnerships, says the company has investigated millions of apps since launching its probe in 2018.

The apps could have been picked out for several reasons, he wrote, including the potential to collect data in violation of Facebook's current rules or their developers' lack of cooperation with the investigation.

"This is not necessarily an indication that these apps were posing a threat to people," said Archibong in the post. "Many were not live but were still in their testing phase when we suspended them."

The post only named a handful of apps and developers—and most had been cited by Facebook previously.

For example, the post mentioned [a lawsuit filed this May](#) against a South Korean data analytics company called Rankwave, and an action announced last month against Hong Kong-based LionMobi and Singapore-based JediMobi for apps allegedly containing [malware that artificially boosted traffic](#) in order to defraud advertisers.

Another app, called myPersonality, was active largely before 2012, according to the blog post. And Facebook said [more than a year ago](#) that the app was being banned from the platform.

"They're three years into closing the barn door, and the announcement today seems to be timed with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's visit to Washington," says Justin Brookman, director of privacy and technology policy for Consumer Reports. "They're trying to make the point that they're a good actor and can be trusted with our data."

Facebook did not immediately respond to an inquiry from CR about the announcement's timing.

## Concerns for Consumers

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Privacy experts say that today's announcement raises more questions than it answers for consumers, given that Facebook didn't name most of the offending companies and apps, or explain exactly what they did wrong.

"What we really need to know is what apps have been affected, and what data elements they collected and who they were shared with," says Pam Dixon, executive director of the World Privacy Forum, an Oregon-based advocacy group. "Did they collect our health information? Did they collect our financial data?"

"It's a shame that Facebook wouldn't be transparent about the apps they banned and why and how it could impact their users' privacy," adds Casey Oppenheim, founder of the data security firm Disconnect.

In the wake of the announcement, the Future of Privacy Forum, an advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., has called for the Federal Trade Commission to investigate. The FTC reached a controversial \$5 billion settlement with Facebook over privacy violations earlier this summer.

"The FTC should quickly act against many of these app developers, since they share the blame with Facebook, and some could still be holding on to consumer data or continuing to sell it," the group's CEO, Jules Polonetsky, says.

Today's announcement comes as members of Congress and political candidates are calling for antitrust investigations of both Facebook and other technology companies, and after almost two years of privacy scandals at the company.

An investigation by the FTC into Cambridge Analytica began in spring 2018. Subsequent privacy scandals included an October 2018 data breach, a Facebook bug that let developers improperly download user photos, news that Facebook knowingly let children amass large credit card bills on the site, and federal charges against the company for alleged violations of the Fair Housing Act.

CR's Brookman says that Facebook's announcement represents a good reminder for consumers to review which apps have access to their data on the platform. "I'd be pretty wary about giving any app access to my Facebook feed," he says.