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February 27, 2017

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Los Angeles Times
[Verizon's takeover of Yahoo is all about user data](#)

USA Today
[AT&T expands its unlimited wireless plan options](#)

Wall Street Journal
[Advertising on Streaming TV Devices Is About to Get More Targeted](#)

New York Times

It's no secret that Google, Facebook, and other websites collect reams of user data. But they're not alone: Verizon, AT&T, and Comcast are also among the internet service providers that collect data on consumers.

Last November, the Federal Communications Commission moved to restrict the latter group, specifically targeting broadband firms' ability to collect data with a set of [new privacy rules](#). But now, under a new chair, the agency is changing course. On Friday, FCC spokesman Mark Wigfield [announced that it would delay](#) the implementation of those rules, a likely first step towards blocking them entirely.

The FCC rules would have required internet service providers (ISPs) – the companies whose broadband lines and wifi networks bring you the internet – to obtain user consent before using location data, health and financial information, and other personal details for advertising and internal marketing. [According to Reuters](#), those requirements would have created an uneven playing field: Restricting firms such as AT&T, Comcast, and Verizon more than companies that simply use the internet, such as Facebook and Google.

"[FCC] Chairman [Ajit] Pai believes that the best way to protect the online privacy of American consumers is through a comprehensive and uniform regulatory framework," Mr. Wigfield said in a statement. "All actors in the online space should be subject to the same rules, and the federal government shouldn't favor one set of companies over another." Last month, ISPs welcomed Mr. Pai's decision to scrap a "net neutrality" rule that would have required them to treat all online content equally. By stepping back from Obama-era privacy rules, the Trump administration's FCC has made another decision that's likely to benefit service providers, but not websites or internet users.

By collecting your personal data, internet companies can target you with ads geared toward your interests or location. This practice drives the business of some internet firms. In the fourth quarter of 2016, Google advertising revenue totaled nearly [\\$22.4 billion](#) – the lion's share of the \$26 billion in revenue that Google's parent company, Alphabet, reported.

During the same quarter, Verizon reported wireless equipment revenues of \$5.4 billion, and "[service and other revenue](#)" of \$28.9 billion. The company's financial statements don't separate the latter into advertising, broadband and cellular subscription fees, and other revenue streams. But with total online

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ad revenue [projected to grow rapidly](#) in coming years, it's easy to see why ISPs would want to shore up their position in this market, and collect user data to do so.

The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual. ~ Vince Lombardi

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users in Europe [enjoy expansive privacy rights](#) under a recent data reform, including consent requirements for processing of personal data and a "right to be forgotten" which allows individuals to demand that old personal data be deleted.

Unlike US privacy laws, [the EU's personal-data regulations](#) don't distinguish between firms' business models. Instead, they focus on how they handle internet user data, administering the activities of "controllers," "processors," and "recipients." The European model could mean a more even playing field for US telecom and tech companies. It also suggests a possible alternative that US privacy advocates may want to consider now that the Obama administration FCC regulations have been derailed.

Former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, who authored the privacy rules, made clear that he's still concerned about Internet users' privacy. "The fact of the matter is it's the consumer's information," he told *Reuters*. "It's not the network's information." – *Christian Science Monitor*

Verizon's white-pages residential phone books have lost mass appeal. Now, even the popular ad-supported yellow pages of business phone listings could soon disappear from many homes.

The telecom giant says that less than 1 percent of its legacy phone customers in Pennsylvania have requested the white-pages residential directories — sacred household references for decades — only five years after it halted saturation delivery of those printed tomes. With the rapid fall-off in usage, Verizon Communications Inc. has told Pennsylvania regulators that it plans to cease blanket deliveries of "all printed directories," including business yellow pages and consumer guides, to transition to digital directories — though Verizon spokesman Michael Murphy said last week it hasn't publicly disclosed a timetable for the shift and Pennsylvania regulators haven't approved it.

Mike Konidaris, director of telco relations and printing at Dex Media, which publishes phone directories under contract for Verizon, said Friday: "We don't want the books to go away. There is still a use for them, and it's still a very good advertising avenue for small businesses." But it also doesn't make sense

For that reason, they took issue with the FCC's privacy rules. [In a petition filed last month](#), they described the rules as "the imposition of significantly more costly and onerous restrictions on ISP use of online consumer data than all other online entities." In delaying these rules, President Trump's FCC chair appeared to agree. The telecom industry claims to have public opinion on its side. Upon filing its petition, NCTA - The Internet and Television Association [wrote in a press release that](#) "data submitted to the FCC shows that 94% of internet users believe all companies collecting or using information online should be governed by the same set of rules."

But US internet users may prefer those rules to be more stringent, not less. Over the past year, the rise of "smart devices" like [Amazon's Alexa](#) and the [My Friend Cayla](#) doll have sparked concerns – and regulatory challenges – from consumer-advocacy groups. Meanwhile, internet

to deliver printed yellow pages to all households, Konidaris said: "We want the flexibility to decide where they should be distributed." The companies —Verizon and Dex Media — are pursuing a similar strategy in New Jersey.

In December, that state's Board of Public Utilities approved targeted distribution of 32 Verizon yellow-and white-pages business directories, including those in Verizon's areas in South Jersey. White-pages residential phone books have been available only upon request for several years in New Jersey. Trends are clearly against printed directories. Not only do Americans now live in a digital world, but the proliferation of cable-based phone services and wireless carriers — Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and others — since the deregulation of the telecom industry in 1996 have marginalized residential phone books.

Neither wireless carriers nor cable-based phone companies such as Comcast Xfinity Voice are required to make customer phone numbers available for published directories. In fact, Verizon estimates that today only 20 percent of the residential phone numbers in its regulated phone areas in Pennsylvania can be found in published directories. The upshot: The Michigan-based Local Search Association, a trade group, found that nationally only 6 percent of phone users utilized published white pages as their chief source of information in 2014. "If people don't use it, there's no use in getting it," Wesley Young, vice president of public affairs for the Local Search Association, said of the white-pages residential directories that have been the first to go. "The problem with having a phone directory now is that you have so many different providers."

Still, many dialers today also can't find important numbers for friends, neighbors, or family members because so many people connect to the outside world through mobile phones. There is no official local or national directory of mobile phone numbers. Wayne Doolittle, owner of the National Cellular Directory, a private company in Minneapolis that specializes in providing mobile phone numbers for a fee, said there was a "huge need for people to find cellphone numbers. There should be a way for people to do it. But people should also have the option to opt out" of listing their mobile number — similar to unpublished phone numbers in the white pages.

National Cellular Directory contains millions of mobile numbers gleaned from data sources including public records, Doolittle said. The company offers a steeply discounted trial service for 99 cents. Other options include \$9.99 for one successful search and \$19.99 a month for 20 searches. Verizon's Murphy said last week that "the public doesn't want a wireless directory, and neither does Verizon." The company has "fought since at least 2004 to protect the privacy of our customers' mobile numbers against publishing — opposing the concept of a wireless directory from the jump even when other carriers in the industry supported the idea early on." As for legacy landline phone numbers, sources for that information today include the toll-free 1-800-FREE-411 (1-800-373-3411). Callers listen to an advertisement before the number request.

Wire-line customers of Verizon can look up numbers on the internet at www.verizon.com/whitepages or request a free directory from Dex Media by calling 1-800-888-8448, Murphy said. Verizon also provides directory assistance for \$2.49 to \$2.79 per call. Another legacy phone carrier, CenturyLink, charges \$3.99 for directory assistance. Verizon disclosed the status of its residential phone directories and indicated its plans for published phone directories in a filing with Pennsylvania regulators. The Verizon filing, initially made in September 2016, supported the phone carrier CenturyLink, which was seeking to discontinue saturation delivery of phone directories in Slippery Rock, Mount Joy, Gettysburg, and other smaller phone markets. Verizon was granted a similar petition related to residential phone books back in 2010.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission approved Century Link's request earlier this month, though the actual order has yet to be published. Google dominates the internet search for business listings. But many people still find local plumbers, painters, or other small businesses through printed yellow-pages directories, said Young, of the Local Search Association. It seems inevitable, though, that more of those people will use the internet. And Young's organization reflects the shift: The Local Search Association used to be called Yellow Pages Integrated Media Association. — *Philadelphia Inquirer*



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