

Sky News
GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK
HIT BACK AT
SNOOP CLAIMS

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/google-facebook-hit-back-snoop-claims-034035744.html#K0vetqR>

by

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Google and Facebook Hit Back At Snoop Claims

Facebook, Google and Yahoo! have vigorously denied knowing about a secret US internet surveillance programme to fight the threat of terrorism.

Reports by the Guardian and The Washington Post, based on a leaked document, claimed nine internet service providers were partners in Prism - set up by America's National Security Agency (NSA) to track customer data directly from ISP servers.

But Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg described the reports as "outrageous", insisting that his firm only provided user information to the authorities when compelled to by law.

On his Facebook page, Mr Zuckerberg wrote: "Facebook is not and has never been part of any programme to give the US or any other government direct access to our servers."

In a blog, Google boss Larry Page said: "We provide user data to governments only in accordance with the law."

"Our legal team reviews each and every request, and frequently pushes back when requests are overly broad or don't follow the correct process."

Yahoo! general counsel Ron Bell said: "The notion that Yahoo! gives any federal agency vast or unfettered access to our users' records is categorically false."

"We do not voluntarily disclose user information. The only disclosures that occur are in response to specific demands."

Prism was revealed shortly after The Guardian uncovered another intelligence programme under which the NSA allegedly accessed the telephone records of millions of US citizens from the private telecoms provider Verizon.

President Barack Obama has defended the phone and internet data trawls as a "modest encroachment" on privacy needed to keep Americans safe from terrorism.

But civil liberties and privacy groups have raised alarm at both programmes, which some have branded "Orwellian" and possibly unconstitutional.

Meanwhile, UK ministers have demanded an inquiry into reports the British signals intelligence agency GCHQ received Prism data from its US ally to access information about UK citizens.

The Guardian said it had obtained documents showing that GCHQ had access to the Prism system since at least June 2010, prompting questions about whether this was authorised by the British Government.

According to the newspaper, the documents show that the intelligence agency, based in Cheltenham, had generated 197 intelligence reports through the system in the 12 months to May 2012.

It said the Prism programme appeared to allow GCHQ to circumvent the formal legal process required to obtain personal material, such as emails, photographs and videos, from internet companies based outside the UK.

GCHQ said in a statement that it operated within a "strict legal and policy framework", adding that it "takes its obligations under the law very seriously".

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