



8 December 2010

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
[ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

**Inquiry into the adequacy of protections for the privacy of Australians online**  
**Answers to questions taken on notice**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee ([http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec\\_ctte/online\\_privacy/submissions.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec_ctte/online_privacy/submissions.htm)) and appear at the hearing on Friday 29 October 2010. Set out below are our responses to the questions taken on notice.

1. Transcript p5: What are Google's worldwide and Australian profits?

Our overall worldwide GAAP net income for the third quarter of 2010 was \$US2.17 billion. We do not break out Australian profits.

2. Transcript p5: What is the amount Google spends on R&D internationally and in Australia on privacy enhancing technology?

We are not able to provide a specific amount for R&D efforts on privacy enhancing technology because we embed privacy responsibilities for our products and systems cross-functionally throughout engineering, product management, legal, public policy and communications. Each function is guided by trained privacy professionals. All Google employees are guided by our privacy principles (available at <http://www.google.com.au/intl/en/privacy.html>) as well as advice from our privacy team.

This approach has led to the development of a number of industry-leading privacy tools for users, and we are continuing to invest in improving user control of information online. For example:

- [Privacy Centre](#) -- Google's Privacy Centre sets out the information people need to control their privacy and directs them to important privacy tools. The Privacy Centre is accessible from [www.google.com.au](http://www.google.com.au).
- [Google Dashboard](#) -- For signed in services, Google Dashboard is the easy place for a person to go to review and control their data and settings for each service they use. It provides details of all of the information they have stored in services, privacy controls for that information and quick links to the privacy policies and relevant help centre resources. For example, under Gmail you can find a quick link to manage your chat history (eg to save chats or keep them "off the record"). Or under Picasa Web Albums you can click straight to settings for sharing photo albums or keeping them visible only to you. The Google Dashboard is accessible from the Privacy Centre.
- [Ads Preferences Manager](#) -- Google provides an industry best practice tool to give people control over the types of ads you see. A person can view, add and remove the categories that



are used to show them interest-based ads (sports, travel, cooking etc) on websites in Google's advertising network. This tool also provides an easy opt-out. The Ads Preferences Manager is accessible from the Privacy Centre.

- To give our users additional control, our [Data Liberation Front](#) has helped ensure people have control over the information they store with us, so if they choose they can export all their information in order to use a competing service. We believe that users should not be held hostage to a service simply because that is where they have stored their information. The Data Liberation Front is accessible from the Privacy Centre (see Privacy Tools).

In addition, we have recently appointed a director of privacy, Alma Whitten, across engineering and product management. Alma's role is about developing great security and privacy features for our users, as well as ensuring we have effective internal procedures. Alma is an internationally recognised expert in the computer science field of privacy and security. She has been our engineering lead on privacy for the last two years, and we will significantly increase the number of engineers and product managers working with her in this new role.

### 3. Transcript p5: How does Google commit in Australia to best-practice laws in the EU?

Google services are available from many countries. Globally, Google maintains industry leading standards of protection of personal information, to meet the expectations of users in Australia, Europe and globally. These standards are applied universally by Google - not just responding to the differing levels of national regulatory protection of privacy of individuals.

At Google, we are keenly aware of the trust our users place in us and our responsibility to protect their privacy. As part of this responsibility, we let our users know what information we collect when they use our products and services, why we collect it and how we use it to improve their experience.

We have five [privacy principles](#) that describe how we approach privacy and user information across all of our products:

1. Use information to provide our users with valuable products and services.
2. Develop products that reflect strong privacy standards and practices.
3. Make the collection of personal information transparent.
4. Give users meaningful choices to protect their privacy.
5. Be a responsible steward of the information we hold.

The Google Privacy Centre is linked to from the Google homepage ([www.google.com.au](http://www.google.com.au)). The Privacy Centre provides easy-to-understand information about our products and policies. Google's Privacy Policy describes how we treat personal information when people use Google's products and services. Our Privacy Centre also provides a number of easy to understand videos that explain our products and privacy practices.

### 4. Transcript p6: There has been some concern in some submissions we have had about monitoring employees' use of computers for private purposes during working hours. Do you do that?

We do not normally monitor employee's personal activities at work.

At the same time, it is very important that we ensure employees follow our internal privacy practices and protocol - no matter their function or task. For example, we regularly upgrade our security



controls, and we carefully control the number of employees who have access to our central systems. We also regularly audit our logs to ensure those security controls are effective.

5. Transcript p8: How many street view cars did you have operating in Australia?

The first Street View cars were in Australia in December 2007 and the Street View imagery launched in August 2008. We have a fleet of Holden Astras and the number of cars operating in any place changes from time to time.

6. Transcript p10: Senator CAMERON - "It seems to me that you are not allowed to fish for law-enforcement purposes—if it is a fishing expedition you are not allowed to do that—but you can fish for profit and you can fish for people who are paying you in terms of your company's profits. I think there is a bit of an issue there, and I would like you to think about that and tell me if that is a position that is acceptable."

With respect to government requests for user data, we follow the law like any other company. When we receive a subpoena or court order, we check to see if it meets both the letter and the spirit of the law before complying. And if it doesn't we can object or ask that the request is narrowed. While we will always be subject to government subpoenas, the precedent set by our resisting a 2006 US Department of Justice subpoena as overbroad, means that there is not a carte blanche when demanding data from Internet companies. We believe that if a third party could demand data from Internet companies without restriction, that could undermine confidence that users have in the ability of Internet service providers to keep their information private.

We use the information collected by our products and services to provide users with a better experience. There are important distinctions between the types of overbroad government requests that might be characterised as fishing expeditions, and how we use data to improve our products and services.

First, we don't share personal information with third parties except in a limited number of circumstances where we are required to do so. These include:

- To provide users with services they want;
- To abide by the law - if so, we will make every effort to let users know we had to share their information, unless prohibited from doing so;
- To prevent illegal activity on our site;
- To secure our systems from major attacks; and
- To prevent imminent physical harm.

Second, whenever we use data to provide better products and services, including more relevant advertising, we do so by giving users transparency and choice. With respect to advertising,

- Transparency -- We provide detailed information about our advertising policies and practices, and the ads we serve have "in-ads notice" to give a user relevant transparency at the right time and place.
- Choice -- We offer an effective opt-out for Google interest based advertising. We also let users control the interests used to serve interest based ads through our Ads Preferences Manager.



- No personally identifiable information -- We don't collect or serve ads based on personal information without your permission.

7. Transcript p10: Senator CAMERON - "I also would like to know whether your profit model would allow an opt in on monitoring of the browsing history or on Gmail. Could you say, 'I opt in to allow this monitoring'? Would that destroy your profit model?"

Google's business model depends on earning (and keeping) users' trust, and providing excellent product experiences. Users have a number of choices between paid and free services across the web. Our services are mainly free to use because we can support them through our advertisement revenue. Without that revenue we may not be able to offer such high quality services free of charge.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in the Committee's inquiry into these important matters.

Kind regards

Ishtar Vij  
Public Policy & Government Affairs  
Google Australia & New Zealand