# Disturbing Facts About Google

In 1995, two Stanford University students created a search engine called Backrub. Renamed Google, the company was registered three years later. Today, Google is influential, wealthy and valuable. Anything except content. The company is obsessed with targeted advertising which manifests in disturbing ways. People are tracked without consent online and in the real world, while devices eavesdrop on their conversations. Forever gorging on private lives, Google grabbed Fitbit, has one foot in the banking business and also caused a scandal with its secret Project Nightingale.

## Employees Eavesdrop On The Public

The company released a popular AI home device called [Google](https://listverse.com/2017/08/05/10-events-surrounding-googles-disastrous-adpocalypse/) Assistant. A verbal command activates the system and tells it to record an audio file. In 2019, a leak released recordings of unsuspecting Dutch speakers. The Belgium public broadcaster VRT analyzed around 1,000 clips. Disturbingly, over 153 were accidentally captured. The owners had triggered Assistant without meaning to. Really confidential information was taped and transferred to Google. Indeed, some of the files contained names, addresses and some people even discussed their sex lives.

When confronted, Google admitted it was a security breach. One that enabled its contractors to listen to private discussions without consent. Previously, a spokesperson said that workers listened to recordings from Assistant to improve AI language skills. They claimed to use a mere 0.2 percent and removed all the personal data. The leak proved that this was not the case.[[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jul/11/google-home-assistant-listen-recordings-users-privacy)

## The Ultimate Stalker

Google wants to know your movements. To keep a civilized front, the company pretends to give customers the chance to opt-out. Afterward, users can feel smugly anonymous. In 2018, Associated Press found that users are still [tracked](https://listverse.com/2016/02/05/10-ways-china-might-be-spying-on-you/) even when they explicitly tell Google to mind its own business. For the sake of the experiment, a team member turned off all tracking options on his phone and was shocked by how accurately his route was followed. Worse, his home address was also recorded.

Whenever you open Google Maps, it records your position. So do automatic weather updates. Even just by using the search engine, a person’s location is determined to a creepy degree – accurate to the square foot. Several other services on iPhones and Android devices act as a beacon for Google, betraying the user’s movements and choices.

Responding to AP’s investigation, Google said that their policies were transparent and users could disable tracking and delete records. AP determined that nothing was transparent or easy with Google. The instructions to stop tracking are difficult and confusing. Deleting records is so tedious that few would waste their time with it.

Critics claim the mass tracking is symptomatic of Google’s desire to boost advertising revenue. It seems to be working. Google started tracking users for this purpose in 2014. By 2017, its ad revenue rocketed to $95.4 billion.

## Project Nightingale

Project Nightingale was the biggest data transfer in [medical](https://listverse.com/2019/07/19/10-medical-myths-you-believe-because-of-movies/) history. The second-largest healthcare provider in the United States, Ascension, moved massive amounts of healthcare data to Google. In fact, the tech company was promised the medical information of 50 million Americans.

In 2019, a whistleblower revealed the toxic deal. The anonymous Google or Ascension employee, one of around 300 assigned to Project Nightingale, released a video showing the confidential files and spoke to several media outlets. The proof was also provided that none of the patients ever gave their consent to have their records transferred to Google. Disturbingly, the information contained intimate details, including medical conditions, addresses, names, treatments and lab records. Not even their doctors knew that Ascension had made the deal with Google.

Google insisted nothing was illegal but the whistleblower, speaking for several concerned Nightingale workers, felt otherwise. If nothing was wrong, then why were the project secret and the patients never told? Riding on these questions, the workers feared the information would be misused for targeted advertising, abuse, the creation of new AI or to be shared with third parties.[[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/12/google-medical-data-project-nightingale-secret-transfer-us-health-information)

## The Fitbit Takeover

Fitbit’s story is a [fairytale](https://listverse.com/2009/01/06/9-gruesome-fairy-tale-origins/). Not the Disney version, but the original tales where everything ended badly. When the wristband was introduced, it turned into a fashionable health accessory. Millions of people could track their weight loss, movements, sleeping patterns, and heart rate, among other things. In 2015, Fitbit suffered a disastrous public listing. For years afterward, sales dropped and the firm buckled under stronger competitors like the Apple Watch.

In 2019, Google once meandered into the health industry. In a takeover that cost $2.1 billion, the company was a step closer to accessing Fitbit users’ personal health data. Considering Nightingale, this was not the best news. In fact, the move caused such alarm that Google was cornered by regulators. The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) responded after Tom Watson, the Labour deputy leader, complained to them about what he called a “data grab.”

While the investigation is ongoing, Fitbit said the merger would not allow user information to be abused for ads. However, a former Google employee on the company’s privacy team said the acquisition was primarily motivated to get the private details collected by the wristband. Google is already guilty of amassing information from people’s browsing habits, just to zap them with ads. For this reason, the Fitbit denial is plausibly a big fat lie.[[](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/11/01/google-buy-fitbit-21bn-bid-take-apple/)

## Chrome Is Spyware

Roughly 10 years ago, two new browsers challenged Microsoft’s [Internet Explorer](https://listverse.com/2014/10/04/10-unsettling-facts-about-microsoft/). Chrome quickly rose to the top, offering users a quicker and safer way to surf. Firefox remains the second-largest browser. The two continue to fight for the top spot. One day, the deciding factor could be privacy. People are increasingly getting fed up with online snooping – and Google is proving to be a spymaster.

In 2019, a tech expert browsed for a week and then checked to see how many cookies landed in his dragnet. Incredibly, there were 11,189 requests to place cookies on his desktop, which Chrome would have allowed but for one thing – he used Firefox. The latter automatically blocked the tiny trackers. During the test, an analysis of Chrome’s design unearthed a disturbing detail. The browser strongly resembled surveillance software.

Google no longer seems to care about user privacy. After all, knowing everything about a person increases the odds of a sale. Google remains the world’s largest advertising corporation but Mozilla, which produced Firefox, is a nonprofit with no interest in mining people’s lives. While Firefox and Apple’s Safari browser allow benign cookings (for ads and remembering items in shopping carts), they are actively fighting spy cookies. Google is making no such effort.[[9]](https://www.sciencealert.com/a-tech-expert-says-we-should-stop-using-google-chrome)

## Crushing Negative Stories About Google

Google likes to crush negative stories about Google. In practice, this means their search results have been known to penalize anti-Google articles. (If you found this on page 37 of a search, now you know why.) We know this because it happened to Gizmodo reporter Kashmir Hill, back when she was working at Forbes. She witnessed firsthand Google’s draconian attempts to hide a critical piece.[[2]](https://gizmodo.com/yes-google-uses-its-power-to-quash-ideas-it-doesn-t-li-1798646437)

The story takes place in 2011. Google was trying to promote its Plus [social network](https://listverse.com/2015/08/26/10-chilling-social-media-confessions-to-murder/) on sites like Forbes ‘s. In a meeting Hill sat in on, Google representatives described how choosing not to feature Plus’s “+1” button would cause Google to punish Forbes in search rankings. Since sites rely on search to survive, Hill understood this to be blackmail. She turned it into a story and published it. Then things got heavy.

According to Hill, Google told Forbes their search rankings would suffer if the story stayed up. Forbes caved and canned the story. Then Hill noticed the cached versions had disappeared off Google Search far faster than they normally would, almost like someone was deliberately scrubbing the [Internet](https://listverse.com/2015/06/09/10-depressing-reasons-the-internet-is-destroying-itself/) clean of her anti-Google story. Care to guess who Hill thought was responsible?

## Censoring Speech

98 percent of all American mobile traffic goes through either Google or Apple. When one of those guys bans your [app](https://listverse.com/2016/11/26/10-dating-app-murders/), you’ve got a serious problem. This is especially the case if your app was banned because Google and Apple don’t like what you’re saying.

In August 2017, Google banned social networking site Gab from its app store for “hate speech.” Gab specifically designed its platform to reflect the First Amendment. If something was protected by the US Constitution, you could say it on Gab. This led to speculation that the real reason left-wing Google censored Gab was because who was using it. Gab was conceived to be the right-wing version of Twitter.[[4]](https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2017/08/gab-the-right-wing-twitter-rival-just-got-its-app-banned-by-google/)

To be fair, Gab had some truly evil users, like Andrew Anglin, editor of the neo-Nazi site Daily Stormer. But then Twitter has accounts by the KKK, Westboro Baptist Church, and ISIS, and Google has yet to ban the Twitter app. You can see jihadist propaganda, pornography, speeches by [Nazis](https://listverse.com/2013/03/21/10-deplorable-neo-nazi-organizations/), and images of people being decapitated on Google’s own YouTube. Yet Gab was the only platform banned for hosting extremist content.

## Avoiding Paying Billions Of Dollars In Taxes

If Google has one overarching vision, it’s not to be a company that isn’t evil. It’s to be a company that doesn’t pay [taxes](https://listverse.com/2010/08/19/top-10-truly-bizarre-taxes/). Over the past few years, several European countries have had to drag Google kicking and screaming into their treasuries, hold the company upside down, and shake it until all its misplaced millions fall out.[[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/4adb933e-30d0-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a)

Just this year, Google had to settle back taxes of €303 million with Italy, after the search giant funneled most of its Italian profits through Ireland (where corporate tax is lower). In May 2016, its French offices were raided in a tax probe. A month later, its Spanish offices were raided, too. Both cases are still ongoing. And then there’s Britain. In 2006, the UK launched a probe into Google’s hundreds of millions in unpaid taxes. It only ended in 2016, when Google finally agreed to pay £130 million.

Most of Google’s tax avoidance has been possible thanks to [Ireland](https://listverse.com/2014/02/07/10-eerie-paranormal-tales-from-ireland/), through which it funnels about a third of its global earnings. But even in Dublin, Google makes a mockery of taxation. In 2016, it was revealed that Google only paid Ireland €42 million in taxes on €22 billion in revenue.

## The Wi-Fi Sniffing Scandal

Time and again, the story with Google seems to be the company doing wrong, feigning ignorance, and then doubling down and acting like jerkbags when they get called out. The Wi-Fi sniffing scandal is no different. It was the halcyon days of 2010, and Google was pushing to develop Street View. Part of the plan was including Wi-Fi access points. So Google Street View cars were automatically set to collect Wi-Fi access point information.

That sounds harmless enough, until it turned out that Google had been hoovering up Wi-Fi data packets along with the access information (“sniffing”). Suddenly, we were living in a world where Google was clandestinely collecting enormous amounts of data on . . . well, everyone.[[9]](https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2013/11/11/google-in-trouble-for-streetview-all-over-again-this-time-in-brazil/)

The [scandal](https://listverse.com/2015/07/25/10-juicy-political-scandals-from-the-early-days-of-the-usa/) was huge, mainly because Google lied about it and refused to cooperate with authorities. France fined Google €100,000 for noncooperation. The FTC fined them $25,000 for noncooperation. Australia called it the single biggest privacy breach in history and demanded that Google destroy the collected data. Google pretended it had, only for their [lies](https://listverse.com/2016/02/20/10-dumb-lies-that-tricked-people-with-numbers/) to later emerge. The same thing happened in the UK. In the end, Google’s lies and obstruction forced the company to settle with the US for $7 million.