Google rolling out ‘Incognito Mode’ for Maps, activity data deletion via Assistant

At Google I/O in May the company promised a range of new privacy controls, including preventing undesired location data collection. Accordingly, Google said it would enable Incognito Mode for Google Maps, which is rolling out later this month to Android devices and later to the iPhone.

Incognito Mode won’t collect location data. To date, users have been able to use Maps without being signed in, which is effectively the same thing as Incognito Mode. But now they can remain signed in and turn on Incognito Mode. When enabled, the places users search for won’t be saved or used for personalization. And those places won’t be saved in users’ location histories.

As the graphic above shows, users can access Incognito Mode by tapping the profile image in the upper right corner. A menu option appears to turn on Incognito Mode. However, the option to “use Maps without an account” seems to be going away. Once turned on, Incognito Mode will remain in operation until turned off again.

Voice control over privacy. Google will soon also allow users to delete their Google Assistant (search) activity using voice commands. Google said in its blog post that users will be able to say something like, “Hey Google, delete everything I said to you last week.” This capability won’t have to be turned on and will be enabled by default.

Anything more than a week’s worth of data, however, will need to be deleted manually. The capability will be available first in English (“in the coming weeks”) and the other languages “next month.”

YouTube history. Finally, the company said that auto-delete is coming to YouTube history. The feature was previously announced for Location History and Web Activity. Users can choose to save their activity for three months or 18 months “or until you delete it.”

Why we should care. These privacy controls are a good thing for consumers, and most marketers tend to agree. That’s because they promote trust and confidence.

While some number of people will use Incognito Mode in Maps it’s not going to have a material impact on Google’s ability to target ads or collect location data in the aggregate for analytics purposes.

About The Author

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