

Meta wants EU users to apply for permission to opt out of data collection

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Meta announced that starting next Wednesday, some Facebook and Instagram users in the European Union will for the first time be able to opt out of sharing first-party data used to serve highly personalized ads, The Wall Street Journal reported. The move marks a big change from Meta's current business model, where every video and piece of content clicked on its platforms provides a data point for its online advertisers.

People "familiar with the matter" told the Journal that Facebook and Instagram users will soon be able to access a form that can be submitted to Meta to object to sweeping data collection. If those requests are approved, those users will only allow Meta to target ads based on broader categories of data collection, like age range or general location.

This is different from efforts by other major tech companies like Apple and Google, which prompt users to opt in or out of highly personalized ads with the click of a button. Instead, Meta will review objection forms to evaluate reasons provided by individual users to end such data collection before it will approve any opt-outs. It's unclear what cause Meta may have to deny requests.

A Meta spokesperson told Ars that Meta is not sharing the objection form publicly at this time but that it will be available to EU users in its Help Center starting on April 5. That's the deadline Meta was given to comply with an Irish regulator's rulings that it was illegal in the EU for Meta to force Facebook and Instagram users to give consent to data collection when they signed contracts to use the platforms.

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Meta still plans to appeal those Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC) rulings, believing that its prior contract's legal basis complies with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In the meantime, though, the company must change the legal basis for data collection. Meta announced in a blog post today that it will now argue that it does not need to directly obtain user consent because it has a "legitimate interest" to collect data to operate its social platforms.

"We believe that our previous approach was compliant under GDPR, and our appeal on both the substance of the rulings and the fines continues," Meta's blog said. "However, this change ensures that we comply with the DPC's decision."

The DPC's rulings came after an EU consumer rights group, NOYB, filed numerous complaints against Meta for sweeping data collection that violated the GDPR. In January, NOYB Senior Attorney Romain Robert told Ars that Meta's plan to use a "legitimate interests" basis for data collection would require much more transparency from the company. Robert said it was unlikely that Meta would be inclined to share enough information or release previously unknown details about its data processing that it could satisfy EU regulators under the "legitimate interests" legal basis.

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