The Weather Channel app unlawfully obtained user location data, says prosecutor

The Weather Channel app misled millions of users into allowing it to access their personal location data, profiting off of the data for commercial purposes, the city attorney of Los Angeles alleged in a lawsuit filed on Thursday.

The Weather Channel app is one of the most popular weather services in the United States, and it's rated number one in the iOS App Store in the weather category as of Friday morning. The app has been downloaded over 100 million times across operating systems and the Weather Company, the IBM-owned business, bolsters 45 million active monthly users.

In the lawsuit, the government claims that the Weather Company deceived users into turning on their location tracking, saying it would only be used to receive more precise weather reports. But the company never disclosed that it would also monetize the data and use it for other purposes not related to weather alerts or forecasts. In the lawsuit, the government claims that the Weather Company used the data for targeted marketing and hedge fund analysis.

"For years, [The Weather Channel] has deceptively used its Weather Channel App to amass its users' private, personal geolocation data – tracking minute details about its users' locations throughout the day and night, all the while leading users to believe that their data will only be used to provide them with 'personalized local weather data, alerts and

forecasts,’” the government said in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit cited a report from *The New York Times* last month that highlighted how companies profit off of the location data they receive from users. These apps collect data, just like Facebook and Google, and allow third parties access in order to hyper-target online advertising.

Civil penalties and an injunction are being sought by the California government under its Unfair Competition Law. The Weather Channel did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

IBM responded to the lawsuit, saying, “The Weather Company has always been transparent with use of location data; the disclosures are fully appropriate, and we will defend them vigorously.”

https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/4/18168373/los-angeles-weather-channel-app-user-location-data