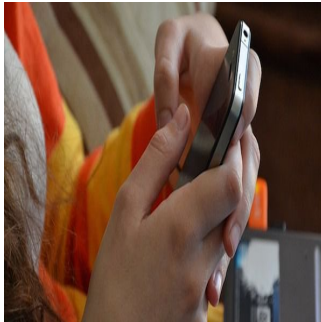

Mobile Health Apps: Are Your Data Safe?



Renowned tech companies such as Apple Inc. and Google Inc. are stepping up efforts towards development of health-focused services for apps developers. However, this has intensified debate around the collection of consumer data via those apps on smartphones and other mobile devices.

For example, Apple's HealthKit, unveiled during the company's developer conference in June 2014, is designed to pull data together such as blood pressure and weight now compiled by healthcare apps installed on the iPad and iPhone. Its Google counterpart is dubbed GoogleFit.

For her part, US Federal Trade Commissioner Julie Brill has expressed concern about how some of the collected data may be shared with other parties or entities.

"We don't know where that information ultimately goes," Brill informed a panel discussion hosted recently by U.S. political site The Hill. This is a cause of worry for consumers, added the commissioner, who has mounted efforts to have Congress pass legislation prohibiting the gathering of personal information under false pretences.

More companies now focus on how data are used because that is where "the rubber hits the road when it comes to patient harm," the FTC head said. Brill would like to see developers giving consumers more tools and options prior to collecting any sensitive data.

Study: Data-Sharing Rampant

In May this year, the FTC released results of a study which examined data-sharing in relation to 12 mobile health and fitness apps. The study found that apps developers were sharing users' data with 76 different entities or parties, including marketers.

However, Brill noted that no one is talking about new regulations. The FTC has previously stressed that health data are sensitive and should have strong protections.

Brill explained that FTC initiatives such as Reclaim Your Name are intended to give consumers more tools for better control over their health data.

Meanwhile, the Association for Competitive Technology and other groups representing apps developers have countered that efforts to curtail data collection could stunt innovation.

They contend that the collection of health data can provide better health outcomes. The mobile health sector must try to educate the FTC about the importance of such data gathering, Morgan Reed told Reuters. Otherwise, he warned, the commission could take action that "would devastate app developers."

Source: Reuters

Image credit: Pixabay

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