



New Patents: Google Wants to Monitor Everything You and Your Children Do at Home

According to recently disclosed patents, Google is preparing to take “surveillance as a feature” to a whole new level, with devices in every room of users’ homes to watch, listen, and analyze users’ every word and action.

Promoting the new devices as a matter of convenience, as it has done with the Google Home speaker, the tech giant seems to expect that users will readily accept even more (and more detailed) surveillance for the promise of greater ease and convenience. The unevenness of that trade-off (something as precious as privacy for something as unimportant as convenience) is why this writer refers to such technology as “surveillance as a feature.”



While Google may have started out as a search engine and is still largely associated with that aspect of its business model, the reality is that Google’s main business (to which the search engine aspect is completely subservient) is data-mining and data analysis. Consider that the tech titan has amassed a net value of roughly \$200 billion by offering “free” services, such as search, e-mail, calendar, and address book, along with YouTube and other services. That \$200 billion has largely been made by gathering troves of personal data on its more than one billion users and leveraging that data into advertising revenues. The company also routinely filters and manipulates search results for the benefit of political candidates and policies favored by the company’s leaders.

The recently publicized patents reveal that the surveillance hawks at Google apparently don’t think enough is enough. In fact, those patents show that the new technology in Google’s offering blows past anything the company has done up to this point. The new technology includes the integration of cameras, microphones, and other sensors that would allow those devices to work together to monitor the comings and goings (using sensors on doors as well as cameras and microphones) of people in homes equipped (read: bugged) with the devices. The cameras and microphones would allow the devices and Google’s servers to recognize people and objects and analyze the significance of the presence of those people and objects. As PJ Media is [reporting](#):

These patents tell us that Google is developing smart-home products that are capable of eavesdropping on us throughout our home in order to learn more about us and better target us with advertising. It goes much further than the current Google Home speaker that’s promoted to answer our questions and provide useful information, and the Google-owned Nest thermostat that measures environmental conditions in our home. What the patents describe are sensors and cameras mounted in every room to follow us and analyze what we’re doing throughout our home.



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They describe how the cameras can even recognize the image of a movie star's image on a resident's t-shirt, connect it to the person's browsing history, and send the person an ad for a new movie the star is in.

That degree of surveillance is far beyond anything found in the current state of "surveillance as a feature."

As an indication of the thinking of the folks over at Google, the description for [one of the patents](#) begins by lamenting the lack of ability to use current "smart-devices" to accomplish the level of surveillance the company desires. The patent is explained in 258 paragraphs. Paragraph [0003] and [0004] state:

People interact with a number of different electronic devices on a daily basis. In a home setting, for example, a person may interact with smart thermostats, lighting systems, alarm systems, entertainment systems, and a variety of other electronic devices. Unfortunately, the usefulness of these devices often times is limited to basic and/or particular pre-determined tasks associated with the device.

As society advances, households within the society may become increasingly diverse, having varied household norms, procedures, and rules. Unfortunately, because so-called smart devices have traditionally been designed with pre-determined tasks and/or functionalities, comparatively fewer advances have been made regarding using these devices in diverse or evolving households or in the context of diverse or evolving household norms, procedures, and rules.

And paragraph [0006] says:

According to embodiments of this disclosure, a smart-home environment may be provided with smart-device environment policies that use smart-devices to monitor activities within a smart-device environment, report on these activities, and/or provide smart-device control based upon these activities.

So, the current state of "so-called smart devices" isn't up to Google's standard? Apparently, the only devices that qualify as "smart" to Google are those that allow the company to analyze your every conversation and movement throughout your home. To drive that home, paragraph [0072] spells out just how two of the processors in the device described by this patent would work together to accomplish the type of surveillance that meets Google's standard for "smart devices." It states:

By way of example, the high-power processor 20 and the low-power processor 22 may detect when a location (e.g., a house or room) is occupied (i.e., includes a presence of a human), up to and including whether it is occupied by a specific person or is occupied by a specific number of people (e.g., relative to one or more thresholds). In one embodiment, this detection can occur, e.g., by analyzing microphone signals, detecting user movements (e.g., in front of a device), detecting openings and closings of doors or garage doors, detecting wireless signals, detecting an internet protocol (IP) address of a received signal, detecting operation of one or more devices within a time window, or the like. Moreover, the high-power processor 20 and the low-power processor 22 may include image recognition technology to identify particular occupants or objects.

Paragraph [0125] explains how the devices would distinguish between voices to determine, for instance, that a room is occupied by an adult male, an adult female, or a female child based on the audio signatures of the voices. It goes on to state, "Video data may optionally be used to confirm or to help arrive at such conclusions." And paragraph [0131] explains how the devices can use "facial recognition or other image-based recognition" along with "digital device presence (e.g., presence of electronic



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devices associated with a particular person), or other inputs ... associated with a particular household occupant or particular type of household occupant” to identify people.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing elements is found in paragraph [0185]. It describes the presence of sensors, cameras, and microphones in bathrooms to determine whether a person is brushing his teeth — based on “an audio signature and/or video signature” to measure such things as “the sounds and/or images of teeth brushing” and the sound of the faucet being left on for the time it takes a person to brush their teeth.

Let that sink in for just a moment: sensors, cameras, and microphones in your bathroom? Remember that paragraph [0125] already discussed the fact that the devices can detect the presence of children. This means that the folks over at Google are already aware that there are children in the world. Those children take baths and showers. Google wants you to point a camera and a microphone at your children while they bathe?

And that is far from the only access to your children sought by Google. Another patent filed by Google discusses the tech company’s plans to monitor children as a type of digital nanny. As *The Atlantic* reported:

The second patent proposes a smart-home system that would help run the household, using sensors and cameras to restrict kids’ behavior. Parents could program a device to note if it overhears “foul language” from children, scan internet usage for mature or objectionable content, or use “occupancy sensors” to determine if certain areas of the house are accessed while they’re gone—for example, the liquor cabinet. The system could be set to “change a smart lighting system color to red and flash the lights” as a warning to children or even power off lights and devices if they’re grounded.

As bad as all of this is, Google makes sure to leave the door open for more. Early on, paragraph [0005] of the first patent states:

A summary of certain embodiments disclosed herein is set forth below. It should be understood that these aspects are presented merely to provide the reader with a brief summary of these certain embodiments and that these aspects are not intended to limit the scope of this disclosure. Indeed, this disclosure may encompass a variety of aspects that may not be set forth below.

So, Google — already pushing surveillance into new areas — reserves the “right” under this patent to push even further as new surveillance ideas enter the darkened minds of the leaders of the company whose motto was once, “[Don’t be evil!](#)”

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