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Blogging and Cyber Privacy Red Faces

Last year Google created its social networking mini-blog site called “Buzz” which sits inside its Gmail service and like Facebook and Twitter, allows followers to post real time updates and share multimedia.

Google was embarrassed at the adverse reaction by users who did not realise that Buzz could automatically select people for the user to follow based on the people the user emailed and chatted with the most.

There was no built in explicit consent or authorisation to grant access addresses to others in that group. By automatically selecting groups of easily contactable users it was possible for people who did not want their addresses to become available to others. For businesses using Gmail this could represent a disclosure in breach of the Privacy Act and a breach of the terms of some social media employment protocols.

As a result of the complaints Google changed Buzz to allow a second chance to review and confirm the people users were following, an option in Gmail settings to disable Buzz completely and another to hide follow lists. The events show that the impact of social media needs review before being launched to the web.



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