

Facebook's over-zealous face tagging

Should Facebook automatically suggest who is in a photo? Sebastian Huempfer asks whether Facebook's photo tagging software infringes the privacy of its users.



On 23 September 2012 Facebook [disabled](#) automatic face tagging in photos for all users in Europe following an audit by Ireland's data protection commissioner. When automatic face tagging is enabled, facial recognition software scans a user's photos and suggests who might be in them. European regulators had for months criticised the feature, with some [arguing](#) the "right to anonymity is in danger". Facebook initially resisted, insisting that automatic tagging did not contravene European laws because users could easily opt out of the service. The company eventually accepted the demands when regulators threatened legal action and fines. Facebook had previously clashed with regulators in Ireland, headquarters of Facebook's non-US operations, and in Germany, where privacy laws [ban](#) any collection of data without the user's direct consent.

The company faced similar problems in the US. In August 2012 the US Federal Trade Commission [finalised](#) a settlement with Facebook requiring "biennial privacy audits for the next 20 years" and forcing Facebook to make all future changes to its privacy policies opt-in rather than opt-out.

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Crucially, however, “[new products with new privacy controls](#)” need not be opt-in. In a statement, Facebook’s CEO Mark Zuckerberg played down the significance of this settlement.

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