Min(e)d Your Own Business

By **JERICHO GONZALES**

According to Facebook, the information of at least 87 million of their users may have been improperly collected and used by British political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica.

In the wake of the data mining scandal that has forced Mark Zuckerberg to appear before the US Congress, Facebook has made several significant adjustments in order to limit the data third party apps can access on their website.

On April 4, 2018, Facebook's Chief Technology Officer (CTO) Mike Schroepfer, posted an official announcement on Facebook Newsroom. The post specified the following changes Facebook has made to its data access policies.

01 Facebook Login

Starting April 4, any app that requests access to check-ins, posts, likes, photos, and videos has to get approval from Facebook first. Facebook has also made its approval process more stringent. The social media giant now has several strict requirements that apps must agree to before they can access posts, comments, and other similar information.

In addition, apps have now lost access to a host of user information including education history, work history, relationship details, religious views, videos watched, and various other user activities.

02 Account Recovery and Search

Facebook has disabled the feature that lets users find other people on the site by entering their phone number or email address on Search. The company thinks that cybercriminals may be abusing Search and using it to collect people's public profile info.

To further reduce the possibility of user info being harvested, Facebook says they will be making changes to Account Recovery as well.

03 Call and Text History

On Facebook Messenger and Facebook Lite for Android, Call and Text History enables Facebook to put the people you regularly connect with at the top of your list of contacts.

The company has taken a closer look at both apps and assures everyone they do not collect message content. They also state that all logs older than one year are deleted from their records.

Facebook has altered Messenger so that it only collects information that is necessary for the app to work, and not specific information such as the contents of messages or the time of calls.

04 Groups

For Facebook group content access, apps previously needed the permission of a group admin or member for Closed Groups and the permission of an admin for Secret Groups. Once apps had access, they could see the information of anyone in the group.

To provide more privacy and protection to groups and their members, apps now need both Facebook's and the group admin's approval before they are given access. Even with access, apps are no longer allowed to see any group's list of members. Facebook has also removed all personal information (names, profile photos, etc.) attached to any post or comment in a group.

05 Pages Application Programming Interface (API)

Before, apps were able to take advantage of the Pages API to read posts and comments on any page—not anymore.

All requests made by third party apps to view Page information now require Facebook's approval. To ensure that only trusted apps have access to this data, Facebook will only be approving apps that can offer useful services to the Facebook community.

06 Events API

Prior to the change, people could give an app permission to get information about events they are hosting or want to attend. This made it easy for apps to see the information of other people attending the event including any post on the event wall.

As of the announcement, third party apps using this API will no longer be able to access the guest list to a Facebook Event as well as posts on the event wall. Facebook will also be implementing strict requirements before apps can use the Events API, and only apps that agree to these requirements will be allowed to use it.

07 Instagram Platform API

In order to improve the security of Instagram users, Facebook has hastened the removal of functionalities that were originally supposed to be removed later this year.

Effective April 4, apps can no longer read public media on an Instagram user's behalf as well as view a user's Instagram profile.

08 Data Providers and Partner Categories

In a process that will take six months, Facebook is going to eliminate Partner Categories, a feature that enables third-party data providers execute targeted advertising campaigns directly on Facebook.

The company anticipates that the effort is going to make Facebook a better, more private online platform.

09 App Controls

Beginning on April 9, Facebook will be showing you a link at the top of your News Feed, wherein you can see all the apps that you currently use, including all the information you've shared with these apps. You'll also be able to remove any app you don't want on your profile.

Facebook will also be advising you in case you are one of the users whose information may have been scrapedby Cambridge Analytica.

Facebook's CTO acknowledged that they still have a long way to go in terms of improving their data privacy. However, he believes that these changes are a step in the right direction to protect the information of each and every Facebook user.