

The FTC Offers Framework for Facial Recognition Technology

Alysa Z. Hutnik

December 12, 2011

On December 8, 2011, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) sponsored a workshop in Washington, D.C. to discuss the privacy implications of facial recognition technology. The web cast is available [here](#). Facial recognition technology has been integrated in a wide range of products and services, including online social networks, digital billboards and mobile apps, which raise a host of privacy and security concerns, the FTC said.

This seminar follows on the heels of Google's release of facial recognition technology that will let users be tagged automatically in photos. Facebook implemented similar facial recognition-photo tagging technology earlier this year. Last August, Carnegie Mellon University researcher Alessandro Acquisti used Facebook photos to demonstrate how facial recognition technology could be used to identify people as they walked down the street. His [research](#) suggested it was possible to identify strangers and gain their personal information – perhaps even their social security numbers – by using facial recognition software and social media profiles.

Given the novelty of the technology, it is too early to say whether this is the precipice of a new advertising medium. According to a recent [article](#) by TechNewsWorld, companies like Apple and HP are watching facial recognition software very closely to see whether the investment is worthwhile. However, those businesses seeking to capitalize on this new technology now would be wise to heed the FTC's preliminary recommendations. The report, released on December 1st and available [here](#), recommends that companies build into their systems adequate privacy controls, referred to as "privacy by design," simplify the ability of consumers to exercise choice as to information disclosure, and improve transparency of their information practices. FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz mentioned the FTC's recent settlement with Facebook as a cautionary tale. "To be sure, the FTC will vigorously enforce the law if we see a violation in the face of the new technology." Pun intended. The FTC will be issuing its final report sometime next month. This post was written by [Alysa Z. Hutnik](#).