

Is Facebook Secretly Listening to Your Conversations? This Video Says Yes

by [Lawrence Bonk](#) | 2:32 pm, November 1st, 2017 We never got hoverboards, but we did get thin slabs of plastic that can access the entirety of human knowledge, plus Tinder. Apps get us food on demand. Games keep us entertained. Social media services let us connect with friends and loved ones. As philosopher **Paul Virilio** [once said](#), “When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck.” So, what disasters lay in wait for our tech-obsessed culture? It could be argued we’ve already seen the worst of it. Facebook seems to have been an [unwitting accomplice](#) to Russia’s meddling in the 2016 election. Internet comment boards consistently shine a light on humanity’s baser instincts. Our president controls the media cycle by bashing out crude, and [often misspelled](#), micro-statements on Twitter.

There’s one shipwreck that has long floated underneath the surface of Internet life, popping into our collective consciousness every now and then, like a sudden outbreak of acne. Surveillance.

Sure, the National Security Agency can [spy on us](#) without a warrant, as **Edward Snowden** so famously revealed, but what about our favorite social media platforms? Phones and computers are equipped with state-of-the-art cameras and microphones, after all.

One married couple claims to have conducted an experiment and reached a harrowing conclusion. They say Facebook is listening to our conversations and adjusts their ads accordingly.

With phones close, the couple talked incessantly about cat food for an entire day in July.

“The cat is almost out of food,” they said. “We should buy some cat food.”

Here’s the thing. They don’t have a cat and claim to have never searched the Internet for feline-related content.

Two days later, according to the video, Facebook began showing them ads for cat food and similar products. Creepy, yes, but is it true? The couple, obviously, says yes, and many Internet users agree. The video went viral, accruing nearly a million YouTube views and over 99,000 “up votes” on [Reddit](#).

Facebook says no, with one product manager claiming the company does not and has “never” used a phone’s microphone for the purpose of collecting information to send to advertisers.

I run ads product at Facebook. We don't – and have never – used your microphone for ads.
Just not true.

— Rob Goldman (@robjective) [October 26, 2017](#)

The company was accused of similar actions last year and was forced to release a statement, which [was published](#) by *Forbes*.

“Facebook does not use your phone’s microphone to inform ads or to change what you see in News Feed. Some recent articles have suggested that we must be listening to people’s conversations in order to show them relevant ads. This is not true,” they wrote.

Baker Lambert, global data director at advertising agency TWBA Worldwide, [emphatically agrees](#) with Facebook, suggesting that people tend to gravitate to conspiracy theories and saying the results shown in the above video were simply “random.”

“There will always be one-tenth of one percent of people who get a weird spooky thing that happens,” he said. “When you think of the scale of Facebook with billions of people and millions of different advertisers. It is always going to happen that someone is talking about one thing or doing one thing and then randomly sees (an) advertisement that matches that.”

As our technology continues to evolve and this conversation continues to percolate, it is worth noting what aspects of digital life social media platforms *do* track and send to advertisers. Facebook, as an example, surveys everything you do on their site and many things you click on outside of their site. All of this gets sent to advertisers, and in turn, you start to see eerily familiar ads when you browse your feed. This is common knowledge.

So, is it that much of a stretch to think giving social networks unfettered access to your cameras and microphones will be buried in some future end-user license agreement? When was the last time you read one of those things anyways?