

Thousands of Google app developers have been reading your emails 62

It's a common practice that's gone largely unnoticed

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Illustration by Alex Castro / The Verge

Third-party app developers can read the emails of millions of Gmail users, a report from [The Wall Street Journal](#) highlighted today. Gmail's access settings allows data companies and app developers to see people's emails and view private details, including recipient addresses, time stamps, and entire messages. And while those apps do need to receive user consent, the consent form isn't exactly clear that it would allow humans — and not just computers — to read your emails.

Google told *The Verge* that it only gives data to vetted third-party developers and with users' explicit consent. The [vetting process](#) involves checking whether a company's identity is correctly represented by its app, its privacy policy states that it will monitor emails, and the data that the company is requesting makes sense for what the company does. An email app, for instance, should get access to Gmail. Some developers have applied for access to Gmail but have not been granted permission, although the company won't say how many.

Google employees may also read emails but only in "very specific cases where you ask us to and give consent, or where we need to for security purposes, such as investigating a bug or abuse," the company stated to the *WSJ*.

Still, it's clear that there are a lot of apps with this access, from Salesforce and Microsoft Office to lesser known email apps. If you've ever seen a request like the one below when entering your Gmail account into an app, it's possible you've given the app permission to read your emails. And as *WSJ* reports, other email services besides Gmail provide third-party apps similar access, so it isn't just Google that may have these issues.

**"THERE'S A
GOOD
CHANCE
YOU'VE SEEN
THIS
PERMISSIONS
BOX BEFORE"**

Image: Google

Some of those “trusted” companies include email managing firms Return Path and Edison Software, which have had opportunities in the past to access thousands of email accounts. The *WSJ* talked to both companies, which said they had human engineers view hundreds to thousands of email messages in order to train machine algorithms to handle the data. Both [Return Path’s](#) and [Edison Software’s privacy policies](#) mention that the companies will monitor emails. Still, they don’t mention that human engineers and not only machines have access.