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# **Reining In Facebook**

Apr 26 2010, 1:15 AM ET | <u>▼ Comment</u>

Online privacy advocates are getting some high-profile support.

This weekend, Senator Chuck Schumer asked the Federal Trade Commission to <u>create guidelines</u> for how user information is shared by online social networks. A bill with <u>similar privacy-protecting goals</u> was introduced in the House on Thursday.

The moves follow an ambitious attempt by Facebook to <u>extend its reach</u> over the Web, which <u>has raised a new round of privacy concerns</u>. But Facebook isn't alone. <u>Blippy</u>, a startup which allows users to share their purchasing histories online, <u>apologized today</u> for <u>inadvertently making available</u> users' credit card numbers and, last month, Google received flak from <u>an FTC commissioner</u> over how it handled privacy when unveiling its Buzz social network.

Schumer's recommendations to the FTC include encouraging social networks to let users opt in to privacy changes rather than forcing them to opt out. Facebook chose the latter route for its recent changes, forcing users to navigate a complicated process to undo them. (Here's a guide to doing so and a Facebook privacy primer.) Spammers and scammers could also solicit unsuspecting users by using data made available by the social network, Schumer said: "There are lots of things that you may have never wanted to go beyond your family and friends but do."

A <u>bill</u> introduced on Thursday by Michigan Rep. Thaddeus McCotter would give citizens better control over that information by forcing sites to remove publicly available information at a user's request. Despite the noble goal, the roughly 300-word document that features a typo in its first line "suffers from some vague language that seemingly opens the door for abuse," <u>wrote Ars Technica's Jacqui Cheng</u>. The Cato Institute's Jim Harper <u>imagines one way</u> the bill could be misused: rabble-rousing users who post false information under various guises in order to overwhelm webmasters with subsequent take-down requests. Nothing good can be said of the bill, writes Thomas O'Toole at TechLaw, "except for the fact that there is little chance it will be enacted into law."

For its part, Facebook has stepped up its lobbying efforts with privacy topping the agenda, according to VentureBeat's Kim-Mai Cutler, who spoke with a company spokesman. As privacy concerns escalate, the company is positioning itself well, Cutler writes:

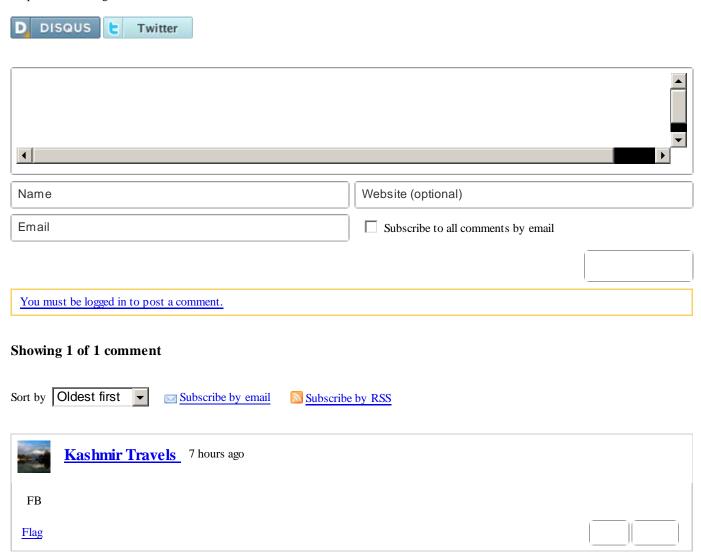
Even though the company says its role in D.C. is about awareness for now, developing these relationships will help Facebook get ahead of and influence legislation that may curb its ad targeting abilities.

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