

Alphabet Inc

Google confirms 'Project Dragonfly' for China

Executive says Google not close to launching new Chinese search product



Len Cali, of AT&T, Andrew DeVore, Amazon, Keith Enright, Google, Damien Kieran, Twitter, Guy (Bud) Tribble, Apple, and Rachel Welch, Charter Communications, testify to the committee © Reuters

Tim Bradshaw in Los Angeles SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

A Google executive has for the first time publicly confirmed the existence of the company's ['Project Dragonfly'](#) venture to build new search tools for China, during a tense hearing with US lawmakers about online privacy.

"There is a Project Dragonfly," Keith Enright, Google's chief privacy officer, told a Senate committee hearing on Wednesday, in response to questions from Senator Ted Cruz.

"I am not clear on the contours of what is in scope or out of scope" for Dragonfly, Mr Enright added. "We are not close to launching a search product in China."

If such a service did launch, Mr Enright said his team would be "very actively engaged to ensure it was going through the proper privacy review process".

After the existence of Project Dragonfly was first revealed by The Intercept news site last month, Google's potential return to China after pulling out in 2010 has [attracted concern and condemnation](#) both outside and inside the company.

Hundreds of [Alphabet](#) employees have [protested](#) the idea that Google might censor search results

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Keith Enright

and potentially give Chinese authorities access to individuals' data.

"We design and launch products with an eye towards making the benefits of technology around the world as broadly as we can," Mr Enright said, but any relaunch in China would be "consistent with our values in privacy and data protection".

"I take pride in Google's record on human rights," he added.

Mr Enright was forced to defend what many see as a potential compromise of Google's privacy values at the same time as pushing for new federal data protection legislation in the US that would override state-by-state rules.



Keith Enright, chief privacy officer at Google, testifies in Washington: 'There is a Project Dragonfly' © Reuters

Despite opposition from Silicon Valley companies, California recently passed sweeping new privacy legislation, in the wake of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), raising the prospect of a patchwork of inconsistent rules across the US and around the world.

Mr Enright said that Google had already spent "hundreds of years of human time" complying with GDPR.

Alongside Google, officials from Apple, Amazon, Twitter, AT&T and Charter Communications [all said](#)

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federal legislation is needed to help protect consumers

Bud Tribble, Apple

[they supported federal legislation](#)— albeit with a variety of qualifiers that suggested they did not want any national rules to constrain the services they currently offer to consumers.

“We believe that comprehensive federal legislation is needed to help protect consumers,” said Bud Tribble, Apple’s vice-president for software technology. “I have oodles of information about my life sitting in my pocket right now . . . That is only going to increase.”

There was support for a more consistent definition of what constitutes the “personal information” that should be regulated, though the internet firms pushed back at taking the European approach from GDPR, which includes data collected from a user as well as names and email addresses.

The tech and telecoms companies were wary of handing too many new powers and rulemaking authority to the US Federal Trade Commission, which serves as the country’s main privacy watchdog today.

“We don’t support unfettered discretion in any agency,” said AT&T policy chief Len Cali, saying it was the job of Congress to “set the guard rails”.



Senator John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota and chairman of the Senate commerce committee, right, greets Keith Enright, chief privacy officer with Google © Bloomberg

Senator John Thune, chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, which held Wednesday’s hearing, observed that the tech companies’ responses included “lots of qualified yeses and qualified noes” when questioned about making the FTC tougher. “Does that

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make them maybes?”

During nearly three hours of questioning, senators quizzed Apple and Google about apps for their smartphones that gathered data from children, and Amazon about its facial recognition technology. As well as Google, Apple and Amazon were also pressed about how they have to change the way they operate their services to comply with rules in China.

Andrew DeVore, Amazon’s associate general counsel, admitted that its Amazon Web Services unit was “structured differently in China” but denied that it had relinquished control of its operations there to its local partners.

“We make our software for customers not countries,” said Mr Tribble. “Privacy is one of our central values.”

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