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Facebook Says Privacy-setting Bug Affected as Many as 14 million Users

Facebook said a software bug led some users to post publicly by default regardless of their previous settings. The bug affected as many as 14 million users over several days in May. The problem, which Facebook said it has fixed, is the latest privacy scandal for the world's largest social media company. It said the bug automatically suggested that users make new posts public, even if they had previously restricted posts to "friends only" or another private setting. If users did not notice the new default suggestion, they unwittingly sent their post to a broader audience than they had intended. Erin Egan, Facebook's chief privacy officer, said the bug did not affect past posts. Facebook is notifying users who were affected and posted publicly during the time the bug was active, advising them to review their posts. Facebook, which has 2.2 billion users, says the bug was active from May 18 until May 27. While the company says it stopped the error on May 22, it was not able to change all the posts back to their original privacy parameters until later. The mistake happened when the company built a new way for people to share "featured items" on their profiles. These items, which include posts and photo albums, are automatically public. In the process of creating this feature, Facebook said it accidentally made the suggested audience for all new posts public. When people post to Facebook, the service suggests a default distribution for their posts based on past privacy settings. If someone made all posts "friends only" in the past, it will set their next post to "friends only" as well. People can still manually change the privacy level of the posts — anywhere from "public".