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Yahoo Still Scans your Emails for Ads

A deep dive in The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday dug out new details on a massive email scanning operation by Oath, the Verizon-owned subsidiary that's the combined business of AOL and Yahoo. The email-scanning program analyzes over 200 million AOL and Yahoo inboxes for data that can be sold to advertisers. The logic goes that by learning about its users, the internet giant can hone its ad-targeting effort to display the most relevant ads. But where other major email providers have bailed from email scanning amid privacy scandals and security issues, Oath remains the outlier. Google ended its ad-targeting email-scanning operation across its consumer Gmail service last year — a decision lauded after facing criticism for years over the practice — though the company still uses machine learning to help you reply to emails. Meanwhile, Microsoft told TechCrunch in a statement that it does “not use email content for ad targeting in any way, anywhere in Microsoft.” And Apple has never scanned its customers’ inboxes for advertising, though its privacy policy says it can access your data for law enforcement purposes or for more vague reasons like “issues of public importance”. Although the email scanning program isn’t new — announced earlier this year — it does go deeper than Gmail’s scanning ever did. “Yahoo mined users’ emails in part to discover products they bought through receipts from e-commerce companies such as Amazon.com,” said the WSJ. “In 2015, Amazon stopped including full itemized receipts in the emails it sends customers, partly because the

company didn't want Yahoo and others gathering that data for their own use." Yahoo Mail's privacy policy says email accounts are subject to "manual review," which allows certain Oath employees access to inboxes.