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Google+ to Shut Down Following Bug that Exposed 500K Profiles

Google today announced that it will shut down the consumer version of Google+ following the discovery of a bug that it opted to keep secret. In a blog post, the search giant framed the decision as one that makes sense given that very few people actively use Google+—"90% of Google+ user sessions are less than five seconds," writes Ben Smith, a Google Fellow and VP of Engineering—and it doesn't warrant the work required to keep tabs on developers. "A memo reviewed by the Journal prepared by Google's legal and policy staff and shared with senior executives warned that disclosing the incident would likely trigger 'immediate regulatory interest' and invite comparisons to Facebook's leak of user information to data firm Cambridge Analytica," the Journal says. In the blog post, Smith says Google discovered the bug in March as part of Project Strobe—"a root-and-branch review of third-party developer access to Google account and Android device data and of our philosophy around apps' data access." The bug, according to Google, meant that third-party apps had access to "profile fields that were shared with the user, but not marked as public," like name, email address, occupation, gender, and age. Google+ posts, messages, Google account data, phone numbers, or G Suite content were not accessible. "We found no evidence that any developer was aware of this bug, or abusing the API, and we found no evidence that any Profile data was misused," Smith says. The bug, which Google patched in March, affected about 500,000 Google+ users. Was yours one of those accounts? Sorry, there's no way to tell. The Google+ shutdown, meanwhile, will occur over the next 10 months, so get your fill before August 2019. If you use the service for work, though, Google+ is not going anywhere.