

Designing research and services for possible use in consumer protection enforcement

Maggie Oates - ConPro 2024

We ♥
enforcement



Maggie Oates
Policy Analyst
Consumer Reports



Stephanie Nguyen

Product designer and researcher, formerly at Consumer Reports.



About Me →

December 17, 2020

CR Digital Lab Investigates Privacy Practices of Mental Health Apps



Today, we're sharing our findings from a comparative privacy evaluation of seven mental

health
[full rep](#)

Why d
practic

These apps are a growing industry. COVID-19 have negatively affected health—creating barriers for access to mental illness and depression.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BEFORE THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS:

Lina M. Khan, Chair
Rebecca Kelly Slaughter
Alvaro M. Bedoya

In the Matter of

BETTERHELP, INC., a corporation,
also d/b/a
COMPILE, INC.,
also d/b/a MYTHERAPIST,
also d/b/a TEEN COUNSELING,
also d/b/a FAITHFUL COUNSELING,
also d/b/a PRIDE COUNSELING,
also d/b/a ICOUNSELING,
also d/b/a REGAIN,
also d/b/a TERAPEUTA.

DOCKET NO. C-4796

Strategic considerations

- What enforcer has jurisdiction?
 - US state agencies, AGs
 - US Federal agencies (FTC, CFPB, Bureau of Con Pro)
 - EU & national agencies (out of my expertise)
- Is your target strategic?
 - Look for signs that your topic is a priority
 - When does your law go into effect? When does enforcement start?
 - Does the enforcer currently have the skillset to investigate your topic?
- Have you invested in relationships with regulators or enforcers?

EXAMPLE

FTC press releases & recent cases can give hints about commission's priorities.



Ethical considerations

- **Are your participants on board?**
 - Are you exposing consumers to known risks?
 - Avoid pressuring your team into using personal accounts for testing
 - Sharing PII often required or helpful
- **Consider reaching out to offending parties before filing complaints.**
- **Avoid compromising your central goal for the sake of legal evidence**
 - “Going fishing” is often not appropriate in science

EXAMPLE

Permission Slip is Consumer Report's app for managing consumer data rights.

PERMISSION SLIP
By Consumer Reports

Privacy Policy

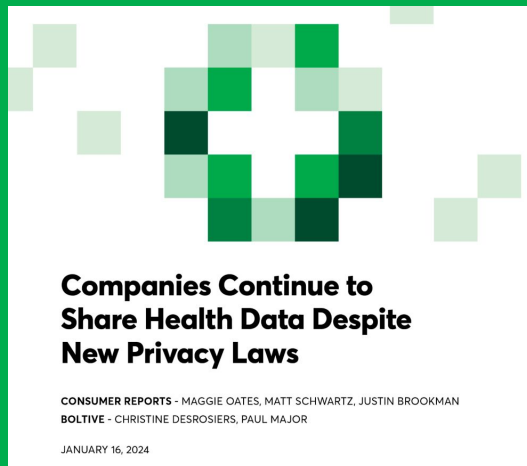
With privacy-sensitive users, we really want to make sure no one is surprised to be included in a regulatory complaint.

Evidentiary considerations

- Is your data legally relevant?
 - Collected from people in the relevant jurisdiction?
 - Does evidence match the letter of the law & regs?
 - Document religiously (screenshots, timestamps)
- Can you articulate a harm?
 - Helpful for complex enforcement arguments
 - Qualitative components are useful - one strong story could be enough for a case
 - Can you word a survey question to articulate harm?
- Do you need evidence representing real people?

EXAMPLE

Virginia CDPA only covers businesses that process 100K+ Virginian data. Sometimes unclear whether health-related businesses in our study are covered.



Practical considerations

- Can you get in-house lawyers/IRB on board?
- Are you willing to wait?
 - Enforcers often require confidentiality, for strategic or legal reasons
- Are you willing to go under the radar?
 - Respect confidentiality norms to maintain relationships
 - Many states have “right to cure” violations
 - You may not receive public credit

EXAMPLE

CPPA complaint form accepts unsworn or sworn complaints.

7. Do you wish to submit this complaint as an unsworn complaint, or a sworn complaint?*

Firsthand knowledge. A sworn complaint means that you are attesting to the truth of the allegations under penalty of perjury in a court of law, and that you are authorizing the Agency to contact the business(es) or person(s) mentioned. See [Cal. Code Regs. tit. 11, § 7300](#).

☐ Unsworn complaint

☐ Sworn complaint

Do the thing!

1. Consider alternatives
 - a. Grassroots & consumer power
 - b. Class action or private litigation (private right of action”)
 - c. Media pressure
2. Identify enforcers & build relationships
3. Design UX/study with evidentiary & ethical concerns in mind
4. Gather evidence
5. File a complaint
6. Wait

Ahead of Data Privacy Day, Attorney General Bonta Focuses on Mobile Applications' Compliance with the California Consumer Privacy Act

Press Release / Ahead of Data Privacy Day, Attorney General Bonta Focuses on...



Friday, January 27, 2023

Contact: (916) 210-6000, agpressooffice@doj.ca.gov

OAKLAND – Ahead of Data Privacy Day, California Attorney General Rob Bonta today announced an investigative sweep, sending letters to businesses with mobile apps that fail to comply with the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). This year's sweep focuses on popular apps in the retail, travel, and food service industries that allegedly fail to comply with consumer opt-out requests or do not offer any mechanism for consumers who want to stop the sale of their data. The sweep also focuses on businesses that failed to process consumer requests submitted via an authorized agent, as required by the CCPA. Requests submitted by authorized agents include those sent by Permission Slip, a mobile application developed by Consumer Reports that allows consumers to send requests to opt-out and delete their personal information.

Questions for discussion

- What stops you from working with enforcers?
- What questions do you have about the enforcement processes?
- For those with expertise outside the US, what is your experience and advice?

Off-topic topics for later

- Baseball teams & facial recognition
- Let me convince you that the most understudied topic in privacy & consumer protection: sex industry & sex workers
- The federal APRA committee meeting happening as we speak!
- Loyalty programs, financial incentives