

Police Uses Social Media: Is Facebook Working with the Police?

A partnership between police departments and social media could allow law enforcement to stop people from organizing protests

By [RT](#)

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A partnership between police departments and social media sites discussed at a convention in Philadelphia this week could allow law enforcement to keep anything deemed criminal off the Internet—and even stop people from organizing protests.

A high-ranking official from the Chicago Police Department told attendees at a law enforcement conference on Monday that his agency has been working with a security chief at Facebook to block certain users from the site “if it is determined they have posted what is deemed criminal content,” [reports](#) Kenneth Lipp, an independent journalist who attended the lecture.

Lipp reported [throughout](#) the week from the International Association of Chiefs of Police conference, and now says that a speaker during one of the presentations suggested that a relationship exists between law enforcement and social media that that could be considered a form of censorship.

According to Lipp, the unnamed CPD officer said specifically that his agency was working with Facebook to block users’ by their individual account, IP address or device, such as a cell phone or computer.

Elsewhere at the conference, Lipp said law enforcement agencies discussed new social media tools that could be implemented to aid in crime-fighting, but at the price of potentially costing citizens their freedom.

“Increasingly in discussion in workshops held by and for top police executives from throughout the world (mostly US, Canada and the United Kingdom, with others like Nigeria among a total of 13,000 representatives of the law enforcement community in town for the event), and widely available from vendors, were technologies and department policies that allow agencies to block content, users and even devices – for example, ‘Geofencing’ software that allows departments to block service to a specified device when the device leaves an established virtual geographic perimeter,” Lipp wrote. “The capability is a basic function of advanced mobile technologies like smartphones, ‘OnStar’ type features that link drivers through GIS to central assistance centers, and automated infrastructure and other hardware including unmanned aerial systems that must ‘sense and respond.’”

Apple, the maker of the highly popular iPhone, applied for a patent last year which allows a third-party to compromise a wireless device and change its functionality, “such as upon the occurrence of a certain event.”

Bloggers at the website PrivacySOS.org [acknowledged](#) that former federal prosecutor-turned-Facebook security chief Joe Sullivan was scheduled to speak during the conference at a panel entitled “Helping Law Enforcement Respond to Mass Gatherings Spurred by Social Media,” and suggested that agencies could be partnering with tech companies to keep users of certain services for communicating and planning protests and other types of demonstrations. A 2011 [Bloomberg](#) report revealed that Creativity Software, a UK based company with international clients, had sold geofencing programs to law enforcement in Iran which was then used to track political dissidents. US Senator Mark Kirk (R-Illinois) told Bloomberg that those companies should be condemned for being complicit in human rights abuses. And while this week’s convention in Philadelphia was for law enforcement agencies around the globe, it wouldn’t be too surprising to see American companies adopt similar systems.

“Is Facebook really working with the police to create a kill switch to stop activists from using the website to mobilize support for political demonstrations?” the PrivacySOS blog asked. “How would such a switch function? Would Facebook, which reportedly hands over our data to government agencies at no cost, block users from posting on its website simply because the police ask them to? The company has been criticized before for blocking environmentalist and anti-GMO activists from posting, but Facebook said those were mistakes. Let’s hope this is a misunderstanding, too.”

Lipp has since pointed to a recent [article](#) in Governing magazine in which it was reported that the Chicago Police Department is using “network analysis” tools to identify persons of interest on social media.

“95.9 percent of law enforcement agencies use social media, 86.1 percent for investigative purposes,” Lipp quoted from the head of the social media group for the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

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