

Spoke media.

KELLY: Hey Bob.

BOB: Hi Kelly.

KELLY: So again, Alia is out of town, so now it's our turn to crank out another minisode.

BOB: When do we get to go out of town?

KELLY: I know we should just take our own Kelly and Bob vacation without Alia and we'll answer every minisode ever while we're there. So minisodes are the listeners opportunity to have any and all of their burning tech questions answered or at least we hope we answered them. Okay. So here's today's question.

TYLER: Hi, this is Tyler from Shawnee, Kansas. So Bob, I have a question regarding privacy and giving my data to companies. Is it better to go all in with a single tech company and all of their products--Google, for example, with Gmail, Google home, Google Chrome, Google search and so on--so that I know that just a single company has my data? Or is it better to use a bunch of different services from different companies--Gmail for email, Amazon echo for smart device, Mozilla Firefox for web browser and so on--where each company only knows a little bit about me instead? Thanks for all your answers and keep up the excellent work.

KELLY: Okay, so this is a question I haven't really thought about, but it's super interesting to me. Bob, do you have an answer for us?

BOB: They've stumped you, which is good. I love this question and I'll tell you all about why after the break.

BOB: Okay, so should you put all your eggs in one technology companies basket? I love this question because first of all, it should be obvious that whether you are Apple or Google or whatever tech company you think about in the past, like Microsoft, they all want you to put all your eggs in their basket. The minute a company works so hard to say, *you know what, forget about all that other software. Make your life easy. Do everything with us*, that should make you suspicious. And anyone who's ever relied on one company for say, internet, phone, cable security, entertainment, you've come to the same conclusion, right? So first of all I believe in, just as a pure consumer, diversity is your friend. As a smart person, it's better to be able to use both a PC and a Mac. And from a privacy standpoint, I think security by obscurity in some ways is the best option here. And there's a whole bunch of reasons for that. If you trust one company, you know, what happens when that one company gets hacked or when that one company gets new ownership or when that one company changes its contractual relationship with you? Monopolies are bad period. In a capitalist society and a society where you're trying to have rights in this society where you're trying to have competition that makes products better, anytime

you turn yourself over to one entity, I think you're asking for trouble. So you know there's a downside to what I'm saying of course. It is really convenient to be able to search for a map on your laptop at work, pull it up on your phone as you're walking to your car, walk into your car and have your car automatically display the map that's on your phone and decide, oh, I go here frequently, maybe your car will know to go there every Friday at five o'clock. So there's a lot of conveniences to having one system and having things that are interoperable, but convenience isn't everything. And again, anybody who's ever found themselves on the short end of the stick when, when a new gadget comes out and it has a capability that you just love but can't take advantage of like a- one line of phones are a more tolerant of water damage than the other for example, that's what happened with Apple and Android. If you are all in with Apple then--and you're also a person who ends up dropping your phone in the toilet on a regular basis--ah, you're screwed. You can't change because you're bought into their system. And same thing with privacy. I think you know, one exciting thing is that right now Apple is actually marketing itself as the privacy centric technology platform and that's good. What if they change? So I think the best thing to, for you to do as a good patriotic American consumer and as a person who is concerned about your privacy and the future of your data as the person who's concerned about surveillance capitalism, is to not make things easy for these companies that want to observe you to the degree that they do and instead make it a little harder. Spread your self around, spread your product around. Just like it's best to use a bunch of different grocery stores, a bunch of different gas stations to know a bunch of different providers for other things, it's best to spread your technology dollars and your technology compatibility around.

KELLY: Yeah, I find it very interesting every time I go to Google.com but using my Safari browser, Google is always saying, *Hey, don't you want to just use Chrome? Would you want to just like, it's so much easier if you just use Chrome.* Right. And to me I'm like, not really. I don't, I don't know why I prefer Safari, but I do. Um, but yeah, I've, I've noticed that little tiny ways that they're trying to get us to use their product

BOB: Yeah. These companies are constantly trying to nudge you that way. And one of the most insidious things about that, *Oh, just use Chrome* note is so the one time when you're busy or accidentally click on it or you just are, you know, trying to click through to get to something else and you're distracted, well then that message is gone and all of a sudden your default browser is now Chrome and you don't quite know how that happened then you move on. So I was actually, uh, at MSNBC covering technology when the justice department sued Microsoft for exactly these behaviors for, um, sucking more and more pieces of software into Microsoft's operating system. So slowly but surely forcing people who are using Windows to also use Internet Explorer, for example, and the way that Microsoft integrated that so deeply into the operating system that you kind of couldn't tell where one started and the other ended and you were sucked into the whole thing. And we concluded that that harmed competition more than a decade ago. But here we are again seeing this over and over again. And it's interesting to me that the justice department hasn't taken a more active interest in what companies like Google are doing. Um, there's starting to be talk about that, which I'm excited about. But Kelly, I am

really glad to hear that you are bothered by these messages and that you're resisting because I think that's a really positive thing. As a consumer.

KELLY: I feel like I live my life in very chaotic neutral kind of way. So I don't know if I have a distinct decision on like whether or not I use Google or Apple or something else when I'm using a product. But I just kind of pick it like I prefer Google maps for no reason, but then I use Safari, but then I don't, you know, so like, I don't know if it's like a distinct decision on like very specific things, but I think I'm going to, but I think I'm going to be more intentional on what products I use and diversifying them even more than I already do. What I thought was interesting is I've heard that Apple now has an Apple credit card and for some reason that freaks me out more than any of the other products Apple kind of has 'cause they're expanding into this different market and it feels like Apple is trying to monopolize my life almost. Is that like a real fear?

BOB: Oh, that's absolutely a real fear. Because think about what Apple would know about you if it also knew about all your transactions. And now it's interesting how those things start to occur. Think about Starbucks and the Starbucks app. The Starbucks app is by far the biggest alternate money system we have in America. Like bigger than Apple pay. It's bigger than um, even some smaller banks debit cards, the Starbucks app is a big deal. It didn't seem to bother people when Starbucks moved into the money system and essentially it became a bank. We all give Starbucks billions of dollars in free loans by loading our app with money. But I think Starbucks was clever and did it very slowly. Whereas if when you think about Apple becoming a bank, that is jarring, right?

KELLY: Yeah. I didn't think about that with Starbucks being in a, like essentially a bank. I just thought as, Oh, I can use my gift cards online now, but you're totally right.

BOB: Yeah. I mean, people walk around with Starbucks having hundreds of dollars on, again, a free loan um, and susceptible to fraud and all the other altogether things that happen. I do think you being intentional about using a variety of products is healthy because again, there's new features that come up. This is how competition works. Um, there's new features that come up all the time and you'll miss them if you are blindly loyal to one brand. At this point. I would like to pause and say that as a technology reporter, the one thing that might be the biggest sin you could ever do in the tech world is to write something negative about Apple-- that's been going on for quite a long time. Apple fans are incredibly loyal no matter what. And if you criticize an Apple product, I mean, I was, I was once named the Daring Fireball asshole of the week because I dared to question Apple's iPhone, battery life. So they're very, very emotional. And I mean it's, it's Coke and Pepsi, it's more like Red Sox and Yankees and a lot of people do, uh, you know, like just, we can evidence this by the lines outside Apple stores when new phones are released, when you could, you know, a day later you could just get the phone. And being a fan boy is fun in, you know, as long as it's a, it's a gag. But really it's, and if you aren't constantly looking around to see you, are there, are there better products? Are there better browsers? You're hurting yourself as a consumer. But again, I think back to the core of the question, um, you know, you are also making yourself more and more homogeneous in the eyes of an attacker,

which is always the biggest problem. Internet viruses didn't become a big thing until almost everybody in the world used Windows and then it was easy to write one virus that could wreck the computers. The more different kinds of systems we have, the harder it is to attack you. If you have all your eggs in the Google basket, and a lot of people do this, a lot of people use Gmail as their backup email address for example, if you do that and a criminal gets access to your Gmail, your whole life is screwed. So the more you can spread these things around, the harder it is for somebody to wreck your life in one fell swoop.

KELLY: So I'm just curious, Bob, how far spread do you have your devices and like things that you use?

BOB: Well, I mean, I'm kind of an unfair case because I'm constantly testing things. But I, my friends make fun of me because I use an Android phone mainly because I didn't want to give myself up to the Apple universe years ago, but I carry around an iPod touch, which by the way I think is dollar for dollar, the best value gadget in the entire tech landscape.

KELLY: Yeah

BOB: Um, because it's, it's essentially an iPhone that just can't make calls unless you use Skype, in which case it's almost like an iPhone. I love the gadget and I also use that, I can constantly test, um, see if my website works correctly in both phone browsers, for example. And if there's a new app in the iPhone universe, I can check it out. So I, my, uh, Lenovo ThinkPad is, as I'm sitting here talking to you right now, is sitting on top of my Chromebook. The Chromebook is acting as a stand right now, but I use the Chromebook occasionally to make sure I understand you know, what Google's offering through Chrome. It's always important to know what's available out there and to keep your eye open.

KELLY: Okay. So if you're not like Bob and you're not testing all of these devices, maybe a smaller thing you can do I would say, see if you agree with me, you know just use Gmail but also use Safari or Firefox.

BOB: Yeah, you used the word intentional and I really liked that word. Be intentional about not giving yourself up to a technology monopoly. You know I often say complaining is like voting. As a consumer you complaining about something is the same thing as you voting. If no one complains then nothing changes. A new word I will use, thanks to you, is be intentional about the tech products you use so that you are voting for the opposite of a monopolies. You are voting for competition and capitalism in the world of tech cause the more different kinds of products you use, the more you open the door for innovation.

KELLY: Special thanks to this week's listener Tyler. I hope you don't let your life be run by tech monopolies.

If you have questions about your digital life, write to us or send us a voice memo at sobob@spokemedia.io or tag us on Twitter or Instagram @SoBobPod. Who knows you may be featured on our next minisode.

So Bob, as a spoke media production, it's hosted by Alia Tavakolian and Bob Sullivan.

It's produced by me, Kelly Kolff with help from Reyes Mendoza and Tre Jones.

This episode was mixed by Alexander Mark.

Our head of post production is Will Short.

The songs you heard in this episode come from FirstCom, and our executive producer is Keith Reynolds. Thanks for listening!