

Are Samsung Smart TVs Spying On You?

February 10, 2015 – Yesterday, reports began to surface about a change that was made to Samsung's privacy policy for Smart TVs; televisions that use voice commands. The widely circulated reports were claiming that these televisions were capable of listening to their owners' conversations and then transmitting those conversations over the internet to third parties. That concerned a lot of people, including me since I have more than one of these televisions in my own home. It turns out that the concern was somewhat overblown.

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Frankly, I'm not sure that I see much point in a Smart TV. Yes, they do have some features that are "cool", like the ability to control the TV through voice command. You can turn the TV on and off, change the channel and change the volume in this fashion. You can also access various other features associated with the TV using your voice.

But the "cool" factor wears off quickly and if you are like me, unless you have lost the remote control you may find it easier to use the remote than to try and get the TV to recognize your voice and actually do what you want it to then you are talking to it. So called "voice recognition" always seems to work great in commercials but it gives you some very strange results in the real world.

That said, yesterday's reports of Samsung's eavesdropping TVs could easily have led you to believe that it doesn't if you use their voice recognition, the TV may still be spying on you. Unless you are both blind and deaf, that's highly unlikely.

As previously mentioned, you can turn your Smart TV on and off using your voice. These voice controls work in a similar

fashion to Apple's Siri and Android's voice recognition. And just as these services require a connection to work, Smart TVs also require an internet connection. So, if you don't plug your TV into the internet, you really don't need to read the rest of this article.

If your TV does have an internet connection, you still have little to worry about.

Once your Samsung Smart TV starts using voice commands, a large red icon will appear on your screen and the TV will play a rather loud sound to let you know that it is connected. From that point on, it will listen for you to utter a series of preprogrammed commands. If what you say doesn't fit into those commands, it may assume that you want to conduct an internet search for whatever you are talking about. Either way, what you say will be sent to a "third party".

That third party will be Samsung's vendor for voice recognition software. Once your voice is translated into text, the TV will either obey your command or topic you were talking about will be handed over to an internet search engine.

But Samsung isn't listening to your conversations and providing a list of your interests to advertisers. Nor will you find that the government is listening in to your conversations. But just in case you are worried about either of these things, you can turn off the voice recognition features on your TV.

If you are thinking about purchasing a new TV, you may want to do a little research first. Most TV manufacturers are pushing Smart TVs. But most of them also still manufacture TVs that don't have the Smart TV features. If you aren't into video games and you don't need access to the internet over the television, you can probably save a considerable amount of money by purchasing a basic TV.

by Jim Malmberg

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