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August 7 2006

[AOL: “This was a screw up”](#)

Michael Arrington

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AOL is apologizing in the aftermath of [yesterday’s story about their voluntary release of search data](#) on 650,000 users.

In addition to removing the data, AOL spokesperson Weinstein has left comments on blogs, [including ours](#), and to the [press](#) in general:



All –

This was a screw up, and we’re angry and upset about it. It was an innocent enough attempt to reach out to the academic community with new research tools, but it was obviously not appropriately vetted, and if it had been, it would have been stopped in an instant.

Although there was no personally-identifiable data linked to these accounts, we’re absolutely not defending this. It was a mistake, and we apologize. We’ve launched an internal investigation into what happened, and we are taking steps to ensure that this type of thing never happens again.

Here was what was mistakenly released:

* Search data for roughly 658,000 anonymized users over a three month period from March to May.

* There was no personally identifiable data provided by AOL with those records, but search queries themselves can sometimes include such information.

* According to comScore Media Metrix, the AOL search network had 42.7 million unique visitors in May, so the total data set covered roughly 1.5% of May search users.

* Roughly 20 million search records over that period, so the data included roughly 1/3 of one percent of the total searches conducted through the AOL network over that period.

* The searches included as part of this data only included U.S. searches conducted within the AOL client software.

We apologize again for the release.

Andrew Weinstein
AOL Spokesman

Blogs are certainly [buzzing](#) about this. One of the more interesting posts: AOL employee [Jason Calacanis](#) is suggesting that they stop keeping search logs altogether (great idea, won't happen).

[AOL](#)

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[August 7th, 2006 at 11:45 am](#)

2. [Web 2.5 : The Always-On-You Web >> AOL Releases Search Logs. Who's Next?](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 12:09 pm](#)
3. [gregtyree.com » Blog Archive » AOL releases 500k User Queries](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 12:44 pm](#)
4. [Jimmy Daniels » AOL Apologizes for Releasing User Data](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 12:46 pm](#)
5. [Ubertor Real Estate Blog » Real Estate Carnival](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 1:01 pm](#)
6. [T. Longren » AOL Releases Private Data](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 1:43 pm](#)
7. [Caribbean Business » Blog Archive » “You’ve Got...” a huge privacy issue in your hand, AOL](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 1:47 pm](#)
8. [A Welsh View](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 2:08 pm](#)
9. [Blog The Internet - Blogging the Internet one site at a time... » AOL Said That They Made A Mistake! :\) LOL!](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 3:30 pm](#)
10. [Dan Raine's Blog](#)
[August 7th, 2006 at 3:31 pm](#)
11. [TechCrunch Japanese アーカイブ » AOL、“完全なる失態”と平謝り](#)