

Google still keeps a list of everything you ever bought using Gmail, even if you delete all your emails, and provides that data to political parties, the NSA and marketing companies so they can manipulate you

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Key Points

- Google Gmail keeps a log of everything you buy.
- Google says this is so you can ask Google Assistant about the status of an order or reorder something.
- It also says you can delete this log by deleting the email, but three weeks after we deleted all email, the list is still there.

 CNBC Tech: Sundar Pichai Google IO 2019

Google CEO Sundar Pichai
Google

Google and other tech companies have been under fire recently for a variety of issues, including failing to protect [user data](#), [failing to disclose](#) how data is collected and used and [failing to police the content](#) posted to their services.

Companies such as Google have embedded themselves in our lives with useful services including Gmail, Google Maps and Google Search, as well as smart products such as the Google Assistant which can answer our questions on a whim. The benefits of these tools come at the cost of our privacy, however, because while Google says that privacy should not be a "[luxury good](#)," it's still going to great lengths to collect as much detail as possible about its users and making it more difficult than necessary for users to track what's collected about them and delete it.

Here's the latest case in point.

In May, I wrote up something weird I spotted on [Google's](#) account management page. I noticed that Google uses Gmail to store a list of [everything you've purchased](#), if you used Gmail or your Gmail address in any part of the transaction.

If you have a confirmation for a prescription you picked up at a pharmacy that went into your Gmail account, Google logs it. If you have a receipt from Macy's, Google keeps it. If you bought food for delivery and the receipt went to your Gmail, Google stores that, too.

You get the idea, and you can see your own purchase history by going to [Google's Purchases page](#).

Google says it does this so you can use Google Assistant to track packages or reorder things, even if that's not an option for some purchases that aren't mailed or wouldn't be reordered, like something you bought at a store.

At the time of my original story, Google said users can delete everything by tapping into a purchase and removing the Gmail. It seemed to work if you did this for each purchase, one by one. This isn't easy — for years worth of purchases, this would take hours or even days of time.

So, since Google doesn't let you bulk-delete this purchases list, I decided to delete everything in my Gmail inbox. That meant removing every last message I've sent or received since I opened my Gmail account more than a decade ago.

Despite Google's assurances, it didn't work.

Like a horror movie villain that just won't die

On Friday, three weeks after I deleted every Gmail, I checked my purchases list.

I still see receipts for things I bought years ago. Prescriptions, food deliveries, books I bought on Amazon, music I purchased

from iTunes, a subscription to Xbox Live I bought from Microsoft -- it's all there.

 CNBC Tech: Google Purchases

A list of my purchases Google pulled in from Gmail.
Todd Haselton | CNBC

Google continues to show me purchases I've made recently, too.

I can't delete anything and I can't turn it off.

When I click on an individual purchase and try to remove it — it says I can do this by deleting the email, after all — it just redirects to my inbox and not to the original email message for me to delete, since that email no longer exists.

So Google is caching or saving this private information somewhere else that isn't just tied to my Gmail account.

When I wrote my original story, a Google spokesperson insisted this list is only for my use, and said the company views it as a convenience. Later, the company followed up to say this data is

used to “help you get things done, like track a package or reorder food.”

But it’s a convenience I never asked for, and the fact that Google compiles and stores this information regardless of what I say or do is a bit creepy.

A spokesperson was not immediately available to comment on this latest development.

But it shows once again how tech companies often treat user privacy as a low-priority afterthought and will only make changes if user outrage forces their hand.