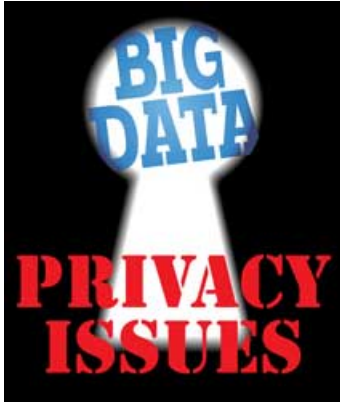


# Technology companies call on US to reform surveillance laws

LONDON, UK: At least eight leading US-based technology companies have called on Washington to overhaul its surveillance laws following revelations of online eavesdropping by fugitive US intelligence whistle-blower Edward Snowden.



Internet companies have called on the US government to revise its surveillance programmes. Image: Michael Brown [Fotolia](#)

Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, Yahoo, AOL and LinkedIn wrote an open letter to President Barack Obama and the US Congress calling on Washington to lead the way in a worldwide reform of state-sponsored spying.

"We understand that governments have a duty to protect their citizens. But this summer's revelations highlighted the urgent need to reform government surveillance practices worldwide," the letter said.

"The balance in many countries has tipped too far in favour of the state and away from the rights of the individual - rights that are enshrined in our Constitution. This undermines the freedoms we all cherish. It's time for a change," read the letter.

They added: "We urge the US to take the lead and make reforms that ensure that government surveillance efforts are clearly restricted by law, proportionate to the risks, transparent and subject to independent oversight."

## Wide scope of US surveillance

Since June, newspapers across the world have revealed the wide scope of government spying by publishing classified documents leaked by Snowden, a former US National Security Agency (NSA) contract analyst now on the run in Russia.

The letter ran in full-page advertisement in several newspapers, including the New York Times. The group, which includes companies that are often fierce rivals, further detailed their security concerns on the website [Reform Government Surveillance](#).

Statements posted on the site show that top company officials fear the public does not trust that technology companies will - or can - keep their online activities of private individuals private.

The companies may fear that increased security concerns will hurt their own ability to track customers for marketing purposes. "People won't use technology they don't trust," said Microsoft's Brad Smith. "Governments have put this trust at risk and need to help restore it."

## US government needs to restore trust

Yahoo's chief executive Marissa Mayer said that revelations of government surveillance meant it is time for the United States government to act to restore the confidence of citizens around the world.

Twitter's chief executive Dick Costolo said that the unchecked, undisclosed government surveillance programmes inhibit the free flow of information.

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, says reports of government surveillance show that there is a real need for greater disclosure and new limits on how governments collect information. Google's chief executive, Larry Page agreed, saying that the

security of users' data remains critical.

"This is undermined by the apparent wholesale collection of data, in secret and without independent oversight, by many governments around the world," said Page.

Leaders of the technology companies have five principles listed in their request. These are:

- Limiting government authority to collect user information;
- Increasing oversight and accountability of intelligence activities;
- More transparency concerning government demands for information;
- More respect for the free flow of information across borders;
- A framework to govern information requests between countries.

President Barack Obama earlier in the year ordered a sweeping review of US intelligence community procedures.

Meanwhile, Russia has granted Snowden temporary asylum as he is wanted by US authorities for leaking thousands of classified documents.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge



Edward Snowden, the man responsible for blowing the whistle on the NSA, is currently safely ensconced in Russia. Image:Wiki Images

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