

MAIL.RU GROUP LIMITED

● Internet and Mobile

Key Findings:

- Mail.Ru failed to clearly disclose policies affecting users' freedom of expression and privacy.
- The company disclosed nothing about how it handles government and private requests to restrict content and accounts, or to hand over user information. Russian authorities may have direct access to user information without needing to request it, but Mail.Ru could disclose its process for handling private requests.
- Mail.Ru ranked lower than Yandex, the other Russian internet company evaluated, which disclosed more about its security practices and how it handles user information. These differences highlight areas in which Mail.Ru could improve.

OVERALL SCORE

22%

INTERNET AND MOBILE RANK



SERVICES EVALUATED

- **Mail.Ru** [Email]
- **Mail.Ru Agent** [Messaging & VoIP]
- **Vkontakte** [Social networking & blog]

ANALYSIS

Mail.Ru ranked 10th of 12 internet and mobile companies evaluated and 14th in the Index overall.¹ As a Russian company, Mail.Ru faces clear challenges: The 2016 *Freedom on the Net* report by Freedom House rated Russia's internet environment as "Not Free."² According to Freedom House, Russian companies must comply with laws that grant authorities broad powers to create internet "blacklists," and participate in a mass surveillance program, SORM, which allows authorities to intercept communications and metadata. But these constraints do not fully explain the company's weak disclosure in a number of other areas. Mail.Ru scored six percentage points lower than Yandex, the other Russian internet company evaluated, highlighting areas where immediate improvement is possible. For Mail.Ru this includes disclosure of its processes for handling government and private requests for content and account restrictions, and requests to hand over user information, indicators on which Yandex scored higher.³

About Mail.Ru

Mail.Ru Group Limited provides online communication products and entertainment services in Russia and internationally. The company provides a search engine, social networking platforms, email services, and gaming and e-commerce services.

Market Cap: USD 3,751 million⁴

LSE: MAIL

Domicile: Russia

Website: www.corp.mail.ru

¹ For Mail.Ru's performance in the 2015 Index, see: <https://rankingdigitalrights.org/index2015/companies/mailru/>.

² "Freedom on the Net," (Freedom House, November 2016). <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2016/russia>.

³ For our comparative analysis of Mail.Ru and Yandex, see: <https://rankingdigitalrights.org/index2017/findings/russia>.

⁴ S&P Capital IQ, Accessed February 13, 2017.



GOVERNANCE 7%

Mail.Ru scored poorly in the Governance category, earning the fourth-lowest score of all 22 companies evaluated, ahead of Axiata, Ooredoo, and Baidu. It received a small amount of credit on just two of the six indicators in this category. It disclosed a whistleblower program, although not specifically

for reporting freedom of expression and privacy concerns (G3). It also disclosed an avenue for users to file complaints, including about blocked accounts, but offered no options for users to file privacy-related grievances (G6)



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION 21%

Mail.Ru received the fourth-lowest score of the 12 internet and mobile companies evaluated in this category, placing just ahead of Samsung, Tencent, and Baidu.

Content and account restrictions: Mail.Ru disclosed far less than most other internet and mobile companies on these indicators (F3, F4, F8). While the company received some credit for disclosing what types of content and accounts are prohibited on its services, it also disclosed it can delete user content without notice and without explanation (F3). Mail.Ru did not provide data about the content or accounts it restricts for violating its terms (F4), nor did it disclose a policy to notify users when it restricts content or their account (F8).

Content and account restriction requests: Mail.Ru disclosed far less than most other internet and mobile companies,

with the exception of Samsung, Baidu, and Tencent, on these indicators (F5-F7). Although there are no laws prohibiting Russian companies from disclosing information about government requests to restrict or block content or accounts, the company provided only minimal information about its processes for responding to these types of requests (F5) and no data about the number of requests from governments or private parties it receives or complies with (F6, F7).

Identity policy: Mail.ru's VKontakte, the social networking service, disclosed that it requires users to provide a mobile phone number and may ask to verify a user's real identity in case a user needs tech support.⁵ Russian internet service providers and telecommunications companies are legally required to verify the identities of their users, but this requirement does not apply to companies such as Mail.Ru.



PRIVACY 26%

In the Privacy category, Mail.Ru had the second-lowest score of 12 internet and mobile companies, scoring better than only Baidu.

Handling of user information: Mail.Ru scored lower than all other internet and mobile companies except Baidu on these indicators (P3-P9). The company disclosed more information about what types of user information it collects (P3), than about what information it shares (P4), for what purpose (P5), and for how long it retains it (P6). Russian law does not prevent companies from fully disclosing user information retention policies.

Requests for user information: Mail.Ru and Samsung were the only two internet and mobile companies that did not disclose any information on policies for responding to requests by governments and private parties for user

information (P10-P11). The company also provided no information about whether it notifies users when information has been requested about them (P12). However, since Russian authorities may have direct access to communications data through SORM, Russian companies may not be aware of the number of times, or for which users, government authorities access user information.

Security: Mail.Ru disclosed little about its security policies, but more than four other internet and mobile companies, including Twitter (P13-P18). Like most companies, it offered no information about its process for responding to data breaches (P15). While it disclosed that the transmissions of users' communications are encrypted by default, the company disclosed little else about its encryption policies, particularly in comparison to Yandex, the other Russian internet company evaluated (P16).

⁵ "VK Privacy Policy," VK, accessed February 17, 2017, <https://vk.com/privacy>.