

# Verizon Media Inc.

Services evaluated:

- **Yahoo! Mail** [Email]
- **Tumblr** [Social networking & blog]

Rank

2

Score

61%

Difference

▲ 3.23

Rank among 12 internet and mobile ecosystem companies

0% ————— 100%

## Key findings

- Verizon Media rose in the ranking to tie with Google for second place, and made a number of improvements to its disclosures.
- Verizon Media disclosed less data than all other U.S. internet and mobile ecosystem companies about the government and private requests it received for user information.
- Verizon Media was unclear about how it keeps user information secure, including how it handles data breaches.

## Key recommendations

- **Be more transparent about policing of content:** Verizon Media should publish data on actions taken to restrict accounts and content that violate its rules.
- **Communicate more clearly about security:** Verizon Media should disclose how it responds to data breaches and be more forthcoming about how it keeps user information secure.
- **Clarify grievance and remedy mechanisms:** Verizon Media should clarify its grievance and remedy procedures for freedom of expression and privacy related concerns.

## Analysis

Verizon Media rose in the ranking to tie with Google for second place among the 12 internet and mobile ecosystem companies evaluated,<sup>1</sup> falling slightly behind Microsoft.<sup>2</sup> As a member of the Global Network Initiative (GNI), Verizon Media was among the top performers in the Governance category, disclosing strong human rights commitments and providing evidence of implementing those commitments. The company's overall score increased by three percentage points, mainly due to improved disclosures about its freedom of expression and privacy policies.<sup>3</sup> Despite this progress, Verizon Media could still improve disclosure in key areas affecting users' human rights. It should be more transparent about how content is policed on its platforms and about its security practices. Verizon Media disclosed less data than all other U.S. internet and mobile ecosystem companies about government and private requests it received for user information.

**Verizon Media Inc.** [previously Oath, Inc.] is a subsidiary of Verizon Communications that provides a range of communications, sharing, and information and content services. Following the acquisition of Yahoo by Verizon Communications in June 2017, Verizon combined Yahoo and AOL branded services into a subsidiary called Oath. In January of 2019 Oath was renamed Verizon Media.

**Market cap:** USD 238.7 billion<sup>4</sup>

**NasdaqGS:** VZ

**Domicile:** USA

**Website:** <https://www.verizonmedia.com>

## Governance 84%

Verizon Media received the second-highest governance score of all internet and mobile ecosystem companies, behind Microsoft. The company disclosed a clear commitment to respect freedom of expression and privacy in the context of international human rights frameworks [G1], evidence of senior leadership oversight of human rights issues [G2], and employee training and a whistleblower program addressing freedom of expression and privacy [G3]. As a GNI member, it engages with stakeholders,

including civil society, on freedom of expression and privacy issues [G5]. It improved disclosure of its human rights impact assessments by clarifying that the board and senior executives oversee the results of such assessments [G4]. However, like most companies, it failed to disclose whether it assesses risks to freedom of expression and privacy associated with the use of automated decision-making and targeted advertising.

## Freedom of Expression 56%

Verizon Media disclosed more than Microsoft, Facebook, and Apple about its policies affecting users' freedom of expression, but still lacked transparency in key areas. It was less transparent about its process for enforcing its terms of service [F3] than all of its U.S. peers, other than Apple. Like most companies, it did not disclose any data about the volume or nature of actions it took to enforce its rules, such as removing content or restricting users' accounts [F4]. Its policies regarding whether or not users are notified of account and content restrictions lacked clarity [F8]. Verizon Media published terms of service that were easy to find and understand [F1]. Its commitment to directly notify users of changes to the terms

was clear for Tumblr but not for Yahoo! Mail [F2].

On a positive note, Verizon Media disclosed more than all of its peers about how it handles government and private requests to censor content or restrict accounts [F5-F7]. While it provided less thorough disclosure of how it responds to requests filed through private processes than it did for government requests [F5], it provided more data about private requests [F7] than any other internet and mobile ecosystem company. It disclosed more data about government requests it received than any company aside from Google [F6].

## Privacy 56%

Despite some improvements, Verizon Media did not disclose enough about its policies affecting users' privacy, disclosing less than Microsoft, Apple, and Google. It disclosed more about what user information it collects and shares [P3, P4], and for what purposes [P5] than it did about how long it retains user information [P6]. Since the previous RDR Index, the company clarified its purposes for combining user information [P5] and provided Yahoo! Mail users with some options to control the collection of their data [P7]. However, it provided less information than its U.S. peers about its tracking of users across the internet [P9], failing to disclose whether it respects user signals to opt out of tracking.

In contrast to improvements around how it handles user information, Verizon Media fell behind its U.S. peers for transparency around how it responds to third-party requests for user information [P10-P12]. It clearly explained how it responds

to government requests, [P10], but disclosed less data than its peers about the government and private requests it received for user information [P11].<sup>5</sup> Like other U.S. companies, Verizon Media did not divulge the exact number of requests received for user data under Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) requests or National Security Letters (NSLs), or the actions it took in response to these requests, since it is prohibited by law from doing so.

It was also less transparent than Apple, Microsoft, Kakao, Yandex, and Google about its security policies [P13-P18]. While it disclosed that it has a security team that conducts audits, it provided no information about monitoring and limiting employee access to user information [P13]. It was among seven internet and mobile ecosystem companies to disclose nothing about its policies for handling data breaches [P15].

## Footnotes

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[1] Verizon Media (formerly Oath) offers a range of services and media brands. RDR's Index evaluates two of these services: Yahoo! Mail and Tumblr. See: [www.oath.com/2019/01/07/oath-is-now-verizon-media/](http://www.oath.com/2019/01/07/oath-is-now-verizon-media/)

[2] The research period for the 2019 Index ran from January 13, 2018 to February 8, 2019. Policies that came into effect after February 8, 2019 were not evaluated in this Index.

[3] For Yahoo's performance in the 2018 Index, see: [rankingdigitalrights.org/index2018/companies/yahoo](http://rankingdigitalrights.org/index2018/companies/yahoo)

[4] Bloomberg Markets, Accessed April 18, 2019, [www.bloomberg.com/quote/VZ:US](http://www.bloomberg.com/quote/VZ:US)

[5] "USA FREEDOM Act of 2015," Pub. L. No. 114-23 (2015), [www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2048](http://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2048)