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Google says the built-in microphone it never told Nest users about was 'never supposed to be a secret'

Nick Bastone Feb. 19, 2019, 9:04 PM



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- In early February, [Google announced](#) that Assistant would work with its home security and alarm system, Nest Secure.
- **The problem: Users didn't know a microphone existed on their Nest security devices to begin with.**
- On Tuesday, a Google representative told Business Insider the company had made an "error."
- "The on-device microphone was never intended to be a secret and should have been listed in the tech specs," the person said. "That was an error on our part."

In early February, [Google announced](#) that its home security and alarm system Nest Secure would be getting an update. Users, the company said, could now enable its virtual-assistant technology, Google Assistant.

The problem: Nest users didn't know a microphone existed on their security device to begin with.

The existence of a microphone on the Nest Guard, which is the alarm, keypad, and motion-sensor component in the Nest Secure offering, was never disclosed in any of the product material for the device.

On Tuesday, a Google spokesperson told Business Insider the company had made an "error."

"The on-device microphone was never intended to be a secret and should have been listed in the tech specs," the spokesperson said. "That was an error on our part."

Nest Guard. [Nest](#)

Google says "the microphone has never been on and is only activated when users specifically enable the option."

Read more: [Google is reabsorbing Nest, the smart-home company it bought for \\$3.2 billion in 2014](#)

It also said the microphone was originally included in the Nest Guard for the possibility of adding new security features down the line, like the ability to detect broken glass.

Still, even if Google included the microphone in its Nest Guard device for future updates — like its Assistant integration — the news comes as consumers have grown increasingly wary of major tech companies and their commitment to consumer privacy.

For Google, the revelation is particularly problematic and brings to mind previous privacy controversies, such as the 2010 incident in which the company [acknowledged that its fleet of Street View cars "accidentally" collected personal data](#) transmitted over consumers' unsecured WiFi networks, including emails.

Google bought Nest — which was initially known for its smart thermostat device — back in 2014 for \$3.2 billion. It became a standalone company in 2015 when Google reorganized as Alphabet, but in February 2018 it was brought back into Google under the leadership of the head hardware exec Rick Osterloh.

Today, Nest offers a variety of Internet of Things products including smoke detectors, video doorbells, and security cameras.

Here is the full comment from Google:

"The on-device microphone was never intended to be a secret and should have been listed in the tech specs. That was an error on our part. The microphone has never been on, and is only activated when users specifically enable the option.

Security systems often use microphones to provide features that rely on sound sensing. We included the mic on the device so that we can potentially offer additional features to our users in the future, such as the ability to detect broken glass."

Got a tip? Contact this reporter via Signal at +1 (209) 730-3387, email at nbastone@businessinsider.com, or Twitter DM at [@nickbastone](https://twitter.com/nickbastone).

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