

Warning – Google powered voice recognition may have a catastrophic privacy flaw

Early adopters of information technology should be aware that online voice recognition systems using Google Chrome for their functionality may create a significant security weakness.

It has been reported that if used once, every word spoken in the vicinity of your computer may be recorded subsequently.

A recent addition to the popular Chrome browser allows users to authorise third party websites to access the microphone in their computer. Coupled with Chrome's voice recognition functions this enables third party websites to offer free services such as "voice to text" transcription, dictation or "virtual assistant" functions analogous to Apple's Siri.

Unfortunately, it would appear that once granted microphone permission could remain in force – allowing such a website to access anything that is said within range of your microphone – even once you have stopped using the website or closed the Chrome browser.

Leaving aside the issue of whether information deliberately entrusted to an anonymous website is sufficiently secure for professional use, using it once could be similar to installing a listening device in your office.

Dictation is not the only service affected, although that is likely to be the one commonly used by Solicitors. Any voice control function offered by a third party website powered by Chrome may be open to this exploit.

Practitioners are reminded that their privacy obligations under Rule 9 of the *Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules* are absolute – "A solicitor must not disclose any information which is confidential to a client ... ". This entails an obligation to take reasonable precautions to guard against inadvertent disclosure.

Further information:

[Aars Technica: "Google turns your computer into a listening device"](#)

New York Times: ["Bugs in Chrome Browser could give access to microphones"](#)

We suggest that until this issue is either resolved or reports are shown to be inaccurate, any computer which has used voice control through Chrome be checked by appropriately qualified IT staff.

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