

## DEEP DIVE

# Data Brokers Deny a Million Pleas to Delete Personal Information

By Cassandra Coyer

**D**ata brokers operating in California have denied or ignored more than 1 million requests in the past two years to delete personal information they collected from online users, according to a Bloomberg Law review of company disclosures and interviews with industry professionals.

In some cases, the brokers acknowledged rejecting nearly all the requests they got to delete consumers' private data, the analysis shows.

Marketing intelligence provider VisitIQ LLC said it denied more than 270,000 petitions out of the 363,000 or so it logged in 2024. HealthWise Data, which makes AI-driven inferences about patients, reported getting 98,000 data deletion requests that same year but complied with fewer than 10,000.

California's privacy law required those data broker firms and hundreds of others to publicly and accurately report, starting in January 2024, how many data deletion requests they had fielded and how they responded. It does not require them to report why they don't comply, but gives them the option to deny a request if they believe it is illegitimate or can't be verified.

The hammer falls Saturday in the closely watched, first-in-the-nation data privacy law: Brokers will be fined \$200 a day if they fail to comply with valid requests within 45 days of them being filed through the state's new deletion system.

The registered brokers not only face some of the highest fines in the privacy space – some estimate penalties could reach [billions of dollars](#) – but they'll also

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have to process requests from more than 350,000 Californians already registered to use the tool, dubbed the Delete Request and Opt-Out Platform, or DROP.

The system reflects growing efforts to rein in the largely unchecked sharing and selling of the very personal data collected every time someone shops online, clicks on a link or doomscrolls.

Tom Kemp, the executive director of California's privacy agency, said the state already assessed tens of thousands of dollars in fines against three brokers it determined had filed inaccurate registration information.

CalPrivacy wants its data broker registry to be "a source of truth," Kemp told Bloomberg Law in an interview Thursday. "I want to be very clear that data brokers have a legal obligation to provide only true and correct information."

## **Shifting Blame**

Most brokers reported complying with millions of deletion requests, according to Bloomberg Law's analysis of the 2024 totals they self-reported to the state.

That tally also shows nearly 890,000 such requests were denied that year, the last one for which updated data is available. Industry experts say that was certainly an undercount and the total grew last year.

## Brokers with High Deletion Denial Rates

Registered data brokers that received at least 5,000 deletion requests, and denied at least half of those requests in full

| Broker                                | Requests Received | Requests Denied | Percent of Requests Denied |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Keyword Connects LLC                  | 5,201             | 5,201           | 100%                       |
| Live Data Technologies, Inc.          | 45,865            | 45,853          | 99.97%                     |
| Online Advertising Network sp. z o.o. | 6,879             | 6,877           | 99.97%                     |
| DTN, LLC                              | 6,218             | 6,202           | 99.74%                     |
| 33 Mile Radius LLC                    | 62,584            | 62,190          | 99.37%                     |
| Convex Labs LLC                       | 35,214            | 34,548          | 98.11%                     |
| DealerX Partners LLC                  | 11,541            | 11,157          | 96.67%                     |
| MarketOps LLC                         | 11,541            | 11,157          | 96.67%                     |
| HealthWise Data                       | 98,275            | 88,648          | 90.2%                      |
| Sterling Data Company LLC             | 7,390             | 6,654           | 90.04%                     |
| Apollo Interactive, LLC               | 15,040            | 13,539          | 90.02%                     |
| 33Across, Inc.                        | 10,478            | 8,468           | 80.82%                     |
| Zeta Global                           | 127,625           | 110,100         | 86%                        |

Source: California Privacy Protection Agency

In disclosures to California’s privacy agency, some data brokers attributed their high denial rates to what they describe as “bogus” or incomplete consumer requests, challenges they face verifying users’ identities, and discrepancies between the personal information they hold and what consumers want deleted.

Some also blame the privacy companies that increasingly act as paid middlemen, signing up users by pledging, for a fee, to stop the sale or exposure of their personal information. Brokers say those contractors sometimes send illegitimate requests, muddying the numbers that end up reported as denials in the state’s data broker registry.

“You’re not able to know: ‘OK, is that consumer real?’” said Jason Bier, chief privacy officer at Adstra LLC, a marketing solutions provider. And even if they are,

Bier said, it's not always clear that the named consumer actually asked for a deletion request to be submitted.

The privacy vendors, in turn, say brokers have become more adversarial, routinely challenging consumers' requests about their data, or ignoring them altogether even after agreeing to remove the info.

"The brokers can't be trusted to audit themselves," said Rachel Vrabec, founder and CEO of Kanary, a data privacy solutions provider. "We've seen that time and time again."

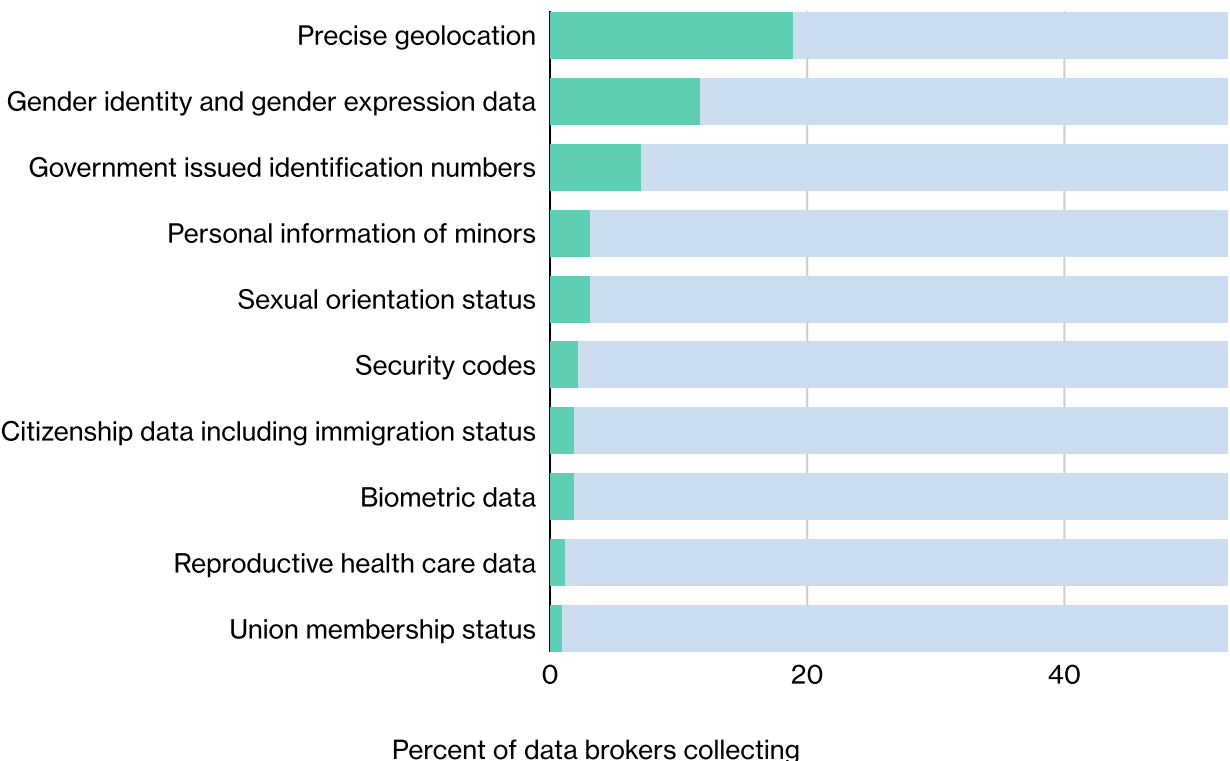
## Expanding Regulation

California's data deletion tool is a step beyond what other states such as Vermont, Texas, and Oregon – who also have launched registries – have done to [tighten the leash](#) on companies that many consumers don't know are trafficking in their personal information.

The law and bolstered registry requires brokers to disclose if they collect sensitive information, such as kids' data or precise geolocation, and whether some of their clients included law enforcement agencies or foreign actors, among others.

The public-facing data shows that some of the brokers that report denying consumers' requests to get rid of their personal information are the same ones that collect sensitive details about them.

Sensitive Data Collected by Registered Data Brokers



Source: California Privacy Protection Agency

Bloomberg Law

Enformion LLC, which sells or shares data with federal and state governments and collects users’ precise geolocation, didn’t fully comply with any of the 80,000 data deletion requests it’s gotten, according to information it furnished for the registry.

Zeta Global, which collects precise geolocation and users’ sexual orientation, denied more than 110,000 out of the approximate 138,000 queries it received.

An Enformion spokesperson said in a statement the company processed all requests it could match to its records and that those denied were “overwhelmingly” requests with no matching record as opposed to requests they declined to honor.

Zeta Global declined to comment. VisitIQ and HealthWise Data didn’t respond to requests for comment.

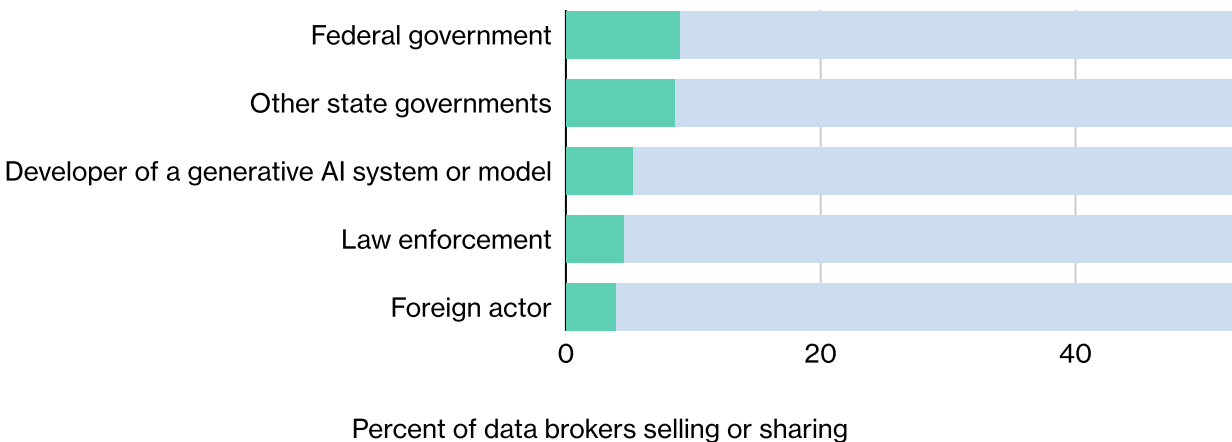
Even in instances where data removal is successful, consumers don't always get a guarantee their information will stay deleted.

Data broker Spokeo Inc. warns online users that it may not be able to honor their deletion requests over the long term because the same personal information might reappear in new records from public sources, according to the [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#). Spokeo didn't respond to a request for comment.

High denial rates risk bringing heightened scrutiny to those brokers, even if they say they had legitimate grounds to challenge users' requests, according to one in-house professional at a registered data broker.

"I don't like it because I don't want to have CalPrivacy come audit us because they think that these numbers don't look right to them," said the professional, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the issue. Though, they added, "It's something we're expecting at some point."

Few Brokers Sell, Share Data with High-Risk Entities



Source: California Privacy Protection Agency

Bloomberg Law

John Doe, 'Yo Mama'

Some brokers attribute the high denial rates – or just the flood of requests they get in the first place – to the surge in data removal services that charge consumers up to a few hundred dollars a year to submit deletion requests. The industry was v0.505.0

valued at \$1.68 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach almost \$8 billion by 2033, according to DataIntel.

Data broker professionals assert that such services scrape the internet to find them then bombard them with deletion or opt-out requests without knowing if their firms actually hold information about their customers or if they are covered under an applicable privacy law.

David Stauss, whose law firm Stauss PLLC represents data brokers, described brokers fielding deletion requests filed on behalf of “Harry Styles” and “John Doe.” Others were signed with fictitious names like “yo mama.”

Privacy protection companies counter that brokers have intentionally made it more difficult for consumers to exercise their rights in the last few years.

“The data broker industry and the lawyers have colluded together to make it an even more of a pain in the ass to exercise either rights that you have or rights that you might have,” said Rob Shavell, co-founder and CEO of DeleteMe, a privacy protection company launched in the 2010s.

Vrabec, from Kanary, also pointed to a lack of resources and professionalism among some data brokers.

“A lot of these systems are built offshore, by ‘bros’ trying to make a buck,” she said. “Some of them, the big ones, are highly sophisticated data systems, but many of these databases are not.”

## **Under the Radar**

Despite the focus on the issue and spread of data removal services, some well-known brands reported receiving few requests from consumers to get rid of their data.

General Motors received just 200 data deletion requests, according to its disclosure to California; Marriott International Inc. less than 350. And about 150 brokers said they didn’t get a single consumer data deletion request in 2024.

These numbers are “really surprising to me,” said Steve Lappenbusch, former head of privacy and compliance at People Data Labs, a registered data broker in California.

That trend will end as DROP kicks into full gear. All registrants in California will be on an even playing field: Requests sent to one broker will go to all of them.

The state’s privacy agency said enforcement will fall to a strike force formed last fall. CalPrivacy has already brought about a dozen enforcement actions against brokers that have failed to register.

Other states will likely be watching California’s model in the coming weeks. Connecticut in May became the first state to successfully emulate California’s data deletion approach after consulting with CalPrivacy.

For privacy protection companies like DeleteMe, Canary, and others, their work won’t end come Aug. 1. Brokers on their list are still skirting California’s registry, Shavell said. And even those registered continue to find ways around compliance, he said.

“God knows many people have really, really important reasons for not being exposed in these databases,” he said. And brokers are still completely negligent in treating requests with a professional attitude, he said.

“Had they complied and had a constructive relationship with DeleteMe and others in our industry, maybe less strict laws that closed loopholes wouldn’t be as necessary,” Shavell said.

– *Graphics by Jon Meltzer/Bloomberg Law*

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