EPISODE #71

Dark Web Deception: Google's Monitoring Shift

Published December 22, 2025 • Runtime: 22:16

https://myweirdprompts.com/episode/dark-web-google-monitoring/

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

Google is changing how it monitors your data on the dark web, moving features into "Results About You." But what does "dark web monitoring" even mean when Google can't crawl it like the regular internet? Join Corn and Herman as they peel back the layers of the internet's hidden corners, distinguishing between the deep and dark web, and revealing why Google's "monitoring" was never what you thought it was. Discover the true scale of the internet's invisible data and whether our online world is as searchable as we believe. This episode challenges our assumptions about digital security and the illusion of control in an increasingly opaque internet.

DANIEL'S PROMPT

Daniel

Google recently announced that it's retiring its dark web monitoring service. This brings up several questions about the dark web and how it's indexed. Why can't we index the dark web like we do the regular internet, and why are specialized monitoring services necessary? On that note, how does Google actually discover and map the regular internet? Is Google's index a representative reflection of what's online, or is it more limited than we think? Finally, once Google retires its monitoring tool, how should the average person check if their personal information—like a social security number—is being shared on the dark web? Is the dark web a legitimate threat for most people, or is it not something we should be overly concerned about?

TRANSCRIPT

Corn

Hello and welcome to My Weird Prompts! I am Corn, and I am so glad you joined us today. I am feeling particularly relaxed, even for a sloth, but we have a topic that is anything but slow today. Our producer, Daniel Rosehill, sent us a prompt that really gets into the guts of how the digital world works. It is all about the dark web, Google retiring their monitoring services, and how we actually find things in the vast ocean of the internet.

Herman

Greetings, everyone. I am Herman Poppleberry. Yes, I am a donkey, and yes, I have already done the heavy lifting of researching this topic before we even hit record. Google recently announced it is moving its dark web monitoring features out of the standalone Google One app and folding them into the Results About You page. Essentially, they are changing how they track your leaked data. But it raises a much larger question about what the dark web even is and why a giant like Google cannot just crawl it the way they crawl a recipe blog or a news site.

Corn

Right, because when I think of Google, I think of them knowing everything. If I lose a sock, I almost expect Google to have a map of where it went. So, if they are the kings of search, why is the dark web this mysterious black box for them? Is it just that they are not invited to the party?

Herman

Well, it is not just about an invitation, Corn. It is a fundamental difference in architecture. To understand why the dark web is hard to index, you first have to understand how Google maps the regular internet, or the surface web. Google uses these automated programs called spiders or crawlers. They start with a list of known web addresses and follow links. Think of it like a massive game of connect the dots. If page A links to page B, the spider follows it, indexes the content, and moves on.

Corn

Okay, so it is like a digital trail of breadcrumbs. But surely the dark web has links too? I mean, people have to get around down there somehow.

Herman

See, that is where you are oversimplifying it. I knew you would. The dark web operates on overlay networks like Tor, which stands for The Onion Router. On the surface web, your browser says, hey, take me to this IP address. It is direct. On the dark web, everything is encrypted in layers, like an onion, and routed through multiple nodes to hide the identity of the server and the user. You cannot just crawl that because many of these sites do not want to be found. They do not link to each other in a public way.

Corn

But wait, I have heard of dark web search engines. If they exist, why can't Google just do what they do but, you know, better? Because Google has billions of dollars and a lot of very smart people in hoodies.

Herman

I think you are missing the scale of the problem. Search engines on the dark web like Torch or Ahmia are incredibly limited. They only know about a site if the owner manually submits it or if it happens to be mentioned on a few public directories. Most dark web sites are ephemeral. They pop up, sell some stolen data or illicit goods, and vanish within forty-eight hours. Google's entire business model is built on stability and relevance. Indexing a site that will be a four-oh-four error by Tuesday afternoon is a waste of their computational resources.

Corn

I do not know, Herman. It feels like you are giving Google a pass. If they can map the entire physical globe with Street View cars, surely they can figure out a way to map a bunch of hidden servers. Is it possible they just do not want the liability? Like, if Google starts indexing the dark web, are they suddenly responsible for showing people where to buy illegal stuff?

Herman

That is actually a very astute point, even if you stumbled into it. There is a massive legal and ethical quagmire there. But even beyond that, we need to talk about the deep web versus the dark web. Most people use those terms interchangeably, and it drives me absolutely up the wall.

Corn

Oh boy, here comes the lecture. Everyone, grab your notebooks.

Herman

It is an important distinction! The deep web is just anything not indexed by a search engine. Your private Gmail inbox is the deep web. Your bank account page is the deep web. Your Netflix queue is the deep web. Google cannot see those because they are behind passwords and firewalls. The dark web is a tiny, tiny sliver of the deep web that requires specific software to access. Google does not index your private emails because that would be a privacy nightmare, and they do not index the dark web because it is technically hostile to their crawling methods.

Corn

Okay, so if the dark web is this shifting, hidden place, how did Google's dark web monitoring service even work in the first place? If they are not indexing it, what were they actually monitoring?

Herman

They were not actually crawling the dark web in real time like a search engine. What Google and other monitoring services do is more like digital dumpster diving. They partner with security researchers who go into these underground forums and marketplaces. They find "dumps" of data—millions of usernames, passwords, and social security numbers from big corporate hacks—and they bring those databases back to the surface. Google then checks if your email address is in those specific stolen databases.

Corn

So it is less like a security guard patrolling a dark alley and more like a guy checking the lost and found bin at the police station?

Herman

Exactly. And that is why Google is changing things. Maintaining a separate "monitoring service" is redundant when they can just integrate those known data breaches into your general Google account security settings. But this leads to the next part of the prompt. Is Google's index actually a representative reflection of the internet?

Corn

I am going to guess your answer is a loud, donkey-flavored "no."

Herman

Correct. We think of Google as the library of everything, but it is actually more like the curated front display of a bookstore. It is estimated that Google indexes less than five percent of the total data on the internet. Between the deep web, the dark web, and the sheer volume of unlinked data, we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

Corn

That is actually a bit terrifying. We base our entire worldview on the information we can search for, but ninety-five percent of the digital universe is invisible to us? I feel like I am living in a bubble.

Herman

You are. We all are. And it is not just hidden data. It is how Google chooses what to show you. Their algorithms prioritize what they think is "helpful content," which lately has been a very controversial topic. They are looking for authority, expertise, and trust. If a piece of information is true but exists on a site that does not meet Google's technical standards, it might as well not exist at all for the average user.

Corn

Let's take a quick break from our sponsors before we get even deeper into this digital abyss. Larry: Are you worried about the dark web? Are you worried about the light web? Are you worried about the medium-gray web? Well, worry no more! Larry here for the Privacy Pouch! It is a lead-lined, artisanal goatskin bag for your smartphone. Just drop your phone in the Privacy Pouch and instantly, you are invisible! No GPS, no WiFi, no signal at all! It is so effective, even you won't be able to reach you! I put my mother's phone in one three weeks ago and I haven't heard a peep about her hip surgery since! It is peace of mind in a pouch. Warning: may cause your phone to overheat and melt into a singular plastic brick. Privacy Pouch! BUY NOW!

Herman

Thanks, Larry. I am fairly certain a lead-lined bag is just a very expensive way to miss your morning alarm, but let's move back to the dark web.

Corn

Right, so Google is retiring the standalone tool. If I am a regular person, and I want to know if my social security number is being traded for three dollars on some hidden forum, what am I supposed to do now? Do I have to download a special browser and go looking for it myself?

Herman

Absolutely not. In fact, for the average person, going onto the dark web to "check" for your data is like walking into a lion's den to see if the lion has your wallet. It is dangerous, you are likely to click on something malicious, and you won't find what you are looking for anyway.

Corn

So what is the alternative? Are we just sitting ducks?

Herman

No, there are still plenty of reputable services. Have I Been Pwned is the gold standard for checking if your email has been in a breach. Most password managers like Bitwarden or LastPass have built-in monitoring now. And as for your social security number, that is what credit monitoring is for. If your data is on the dark web, the damage is usually done when someone tries to open a credit card in your name. Freezing your credit is a much more effective move than staring at a dark web monitor.

Corn

I have to disagree with you there, Herman. I think there is a huge psychological value in knowing. If I know my data is out there, I can be more vigilant. I can change my passwords, I can be on the lookout for phishing emails. Telling people to just "freeze their credit" feels like telling someone to lock their doors after the burglar is already in the kitchen.

Herman

But Corn, the data is already out there! That is the point. For almost every adult in the United States, some piece of their personal information is likely already in a leaked database somewhere. The "monitoring" just tells you what many of us should already assume. The dark web is not this magical place where data goes to be used once; it is a permanent archive of our digital failures.

Corn

I don't know, Herman. That feels very fatalistic. I think people want a sense of agency. If Google's tool made people feel like they were doing something, then it had value. Taking it away or burying it in a settings menu makes the internet feel even more out of control.

Herman

Agency is only useful if it leads to effective action. Watching a red light blink on a dark web monitor while you still use "Password123" for your bank account is not agency. It is theater. Security theater.

Corn

Well, maybe security theater is what keeps people from having a total existential breakdown! Speaking of breakdowns, I think we have someone on the line who has some thoughts on this. Jim from Ohio, are you there? Jim: Yeah, I am here. I have been listening to you two yapping about "onion routers" and "spiders." You know what I saw in my garden this morning? A real spider. A big one. Probably a wolf spider. My neighbor Gary says they are good for the garden, but Gary also thinks he can grow prize-winning tomatoes in a literal bucket of sand, so what does he know?

Corn

Uh, thanks for the garden update, Jim. Do you have a question about Google or the dark web? Jim: I have a statement. This whole thing is a scam. Google retiring a tool? They probably just found a way to charge us for it later. And this dark web stuff... back in my day, if someone wanted to steal your identity, they had to go through your actual trash. Now you're telling me they can do it from a basement in another country? I don't buy it. It sounds like something made up to sell those lead bags that Larry guy was talking about.

Herman

Jim, I assure you, the threats are quite real. Data breaches happen to major corporations every single month. Jim: Oh, I'm sure they do, Herman Poppleberry—if that is even your real name. Sounds like a brand of jam. The point is, you're making everyone paranoid. I've lived seventy-two years without "monitoring" my data, and the only person who ever stole from me was the guy who sold me a "waterproof" watch that fogged up the first time I took a shower. Also, it's raining here in Ohio. Again. My gutters are overflowing because I haven't cleaned them.

Corn

Jim, don't you think it's better to be informed? If your social security number was being sold online, wouldn't you want to know? Jim: What am I gonna do about it? Call the internet police? There ain't no internet police. You just change your phone number and move on with your life. You two spend too much time worrying about things you can't see. You should worry about something real, like the price of eggs or the fact that they changed the flavor of my favorite crackers. They taste like cardboard now. Cardboard!

Herman

Well, Jim, while I disagree with your assessment of the threat level, I suppose there is some wisdom in not letting it consume your every waking thought. Jim: Whatever. I'm gonna go poke that spider with a stick. You guys have fun in your digital onion. Goodbye.

Corn

Thanks for calling, Jim! He's a handful, but he does bring up a point that was in the prompt. Is the dark web a legitimate threat for most people? Or is it something we shouldn't be overly concerned about?

Herman

It is a nuanced answer. Is it a threat? Yes. Is it a threat in the way people think? No. Most people imagine a hacker in a hoodie specifically targeting them. In reality, it is all automated. Botnets are constantly scanning the entire internet for vulnerabilities. When a company gets hacked, your data is just one line in a spreadsheet of ten million others. The threat is not personal; it is statistical.

Corn

See, that makes it sound even scarier! If it's not personal, I can't talk my way out of it. I can't be "too boring" to hack.

Herman

Exactly. But the solution isn't to hide under your bed. The solution is boring, basic digital hygiene. Use a password manager. Enable two-factor authentication. Do not click on links in weird texts. If you do those things, the fact that your email address is on the dark web matters very little because the password associated with it is long, unique, and already changed.

Corn

I still feel like Google's index being so limited is the bigger story here. We think we are searching the world, but we are really just searching Google's version of the world. It's like we are all looking through a tiny keyhole and thinking we see the whole room.

Herman

That is the nature of information. We need filters. If Google showed us every single page on the internet, the search results would be ninety-nine percent garbage, spam, and dead links. The "limited" index is actually a service. The problem is when we forget it is a filter and start mistaking it for the absolute truth.

Corn

I actually disagree that it's a "service." I think it's a monopoly on reality. If Google decides a certain type of information or a certain perspective isn't "authoritative," it effectively disappears from public consciousness. That's a lot of power for one company to have over what we consider to be "the internet."

Herman

It is a lot of power, but who else is going to do it? Bing? DuckDuckGo? They all face the same technical limitations. You cannot index the un-indexable. The dark web is dark by design. It is built to resist the very things that make Google work. You are asking for a spotlight that can shine around corners.

Corn

Maybe I am! Maybe I want a better flashlight. But okay, let's talk practical stuff. If someone is listening to this and they are now worried because Google is moving their monitoring tool, what is the one thing they should do today?

Herman

The absolute first thing is to go to the Have I Been Pwned website. It is run by Troy Hunt, a very respected security researcher. Put in your email address. If it comes up red, look at which breaches you were in. If you still use the same password you used for that site in two thousand twelve, change it immediately.

Corn

And what about the social security number? That's the big one. You can't exactly change your social security number as easily as a password.

Herman

You cannot. If you are in the United States, you should go to the three major credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—and freeze your credit. It is free, it takes about ten minutes, and it stops anyone from opening new accounts in your name. That is a thousand times more effective than any dark web monitoring service.

Corn

I actually did that last year! It was surprisingly easy. Although I did forget my PIN for a week and couldn't buy a new blender, but that's on me.

Herman

A small price to pay for security. So, to wrap up the prompt's question: Is the dark web a threat? It is a repository of stolen goods. It is a symptom of a larger problem with how we secure our data. But for the average person, it is not something to lose sleep over as long as you have locked your digital doors.

Corn

I think I am still a little worried, but that's just my nature. I like to have all my leaves in a row. It's fascinating to think about that ninety-five percent of the internet that we just don't see. All those hidden servers, all those encrypted onions... it makes the world feel much bigger and much weirder.

Herman

It is a vast, messy, chaotic place, Corn. And honestly, we should be thankful that Google doesn't index all of it. There are things on the dark web that no one needs to see while they are just trying to find a recipe for banana bread.

Corn

True. I don't need my banana bread served with a side of existential dread. Well, this has been an eye-opener. We learned that Google isn't actually "monitoring" the dark web in real-time, that their index is just a tiny slice of the internet, and that Jim from Ohio really needs to clean his gutters and leave that spider alone.

Herman

And we learned that while Google is moving its tools around, the responsibility for our digital safety still rests largely on our own shoulders. Or hooves, in my case.

Corn

Thank you all for listening to My Weird Prompts. A big thanks to Daniel Rosehill for sending in this prompt and making us think about the dark corners of the web. You can find us on Spotify and everywhere else you get your podcasts.

Herman

Stay curious, stay skeptical, and for heaven's sake, use a password manager.

Corn

See you next time! Goodbye