



Jeffrey H. Dygert
Executive Director
Public Policy

AT&T Services, Inc.
1120 20th Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

202.457-3844 Phone

July 1, 2016

VIA E-MAIL

Peter Micek
Global Policy and Legal Counsel
Access Now
New York, NY

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter to AT&T dated June 1 and offering recommendations for how AT&T could improve its ranking in the Corporate Accountability Index published by Ranking Digital Rights.

AT&T was pleased to receive the second-highest combined ranking among telecommunications companies in the Corporate Accountability Index and, as your letter notes, the category's highest ranking on privacy. AT&T's commitment to respect its users' freedom of expression and privacy rights is reflected in our [Human Rights in Communication Policy](#), our [Privacy Policy](#), our semi-annual [Transparency Report](#), and our participation in the [Telecommunications Industry Dialogue](#). As you are aware, the Industry Dialogue is a group of international telecommunications companies and equipment vendors that addresses freedom of expression and privacy rights in the context of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

We engage regularly with civil society organizations that focus on digital rights, and we welcome input from these organizations as to how we can improve our policies and practices related to freedom of expression and privacy. In this vein, we have valued our multiple recent opportunities for direct engagement with Access Now, both individually and with other stakeholders through the Industry Dialogue.

We have addressed your letter's specific recommendations below.

1) Implement comprehensive human rights impact assessments.

AT&T has not previously conducted a human rights impact assessment because our retail, consumer operations were limited to the United States. In the U.S., robust rule-of-law protections and an active civil-society sector effectively monitor and safeguard freedom of expression and privacy rights. However, in 2015, we acquired two Mexican wireless operators serving the mass market.

Following those acquisitions, we retained an external, nonprofit consulting group with deep experience in developing sustainable business strategies to conduct a broad-ranging human rights impact assessment of our new, Mexican wireless operations. This assessment involves

Peter Micek
Access Now
July 1, 2016

consultations with civil-society organizations, as well as other stakeholders, and will analyze the potential impacts of our Mexican operations across a variety of human rights, including our customers' freedom of expression and privacy. Once the assessment is complete, we will review it carefully for lessons about how we may be able to improve our operations' respect for the numerous human rights surveyed.

2) Ensure that institutionalized commitments on privacy are matched by commitments on free expression issues.

As a communications provider, AT&T does not have a significant business hosting user content. Our [Human Rights in Communication Policy](#), which we adopted in 2010, prominently highlights our commitment to freedom of expression. The first full paragraph of the policy statement reads:

We respect and protect the freedom of expression of our users. We promote the right of our users to hold and freely share opinions without interference, and to access the full range of ideas and information. We seek to protect our users, particularly children, from harmful content by providing tools and information and by working with those dedicated to Internet safety. We believe restrictions on freedom of expression using communications services and the Internet will diminish their usefulness, dampen the exchange of ideas and reduce innovation and commercial opportunities.

The policy further states that we “restrict access to content when we receive a legally enforceable order from the appropriate government authority, or if the content violates the service’s terms of use. When applicable laws restrict access to content, to the extent permitted by the laws, we will attempt to let users know that access is limited due to governmental restriction.”

Presently, AT&T is one of only a few telecommunications companies to include numbers of government content blocking requests in its [Transparency Report](#). As the report explains, these requests originate from foreign governments in the countries where we provide services to large multi-national enterprise customers.

As you know, there is broad protection for freedom of speech in the United States. We do not receive, from government entities in the U.S., content-blocking requests that would affect users' freedom of expression. Our Transparency Report also indicates that we do not receive government requests to block content in Mexico.

As an aside, we note the Ranking Digital Rights survey asked whether AT&T restricts access to content in response to requests from non-governmental third parties. To be clear on this point, AT&T responds only to blocking requests that have come through appropriate, legal channels. As our Transparency Report discusses, we block access to content only in response to “civil and criminal legal demands originating outside the U.S. and related to AT&T’s operations in foreign countries.”

Peter Micek
Access Now
July 1, 2016

3) Clearly communicate with your users about data retention policies.

As described in AT&T's [Privacy Policy](#), we retain personal information as long as it is needed for business, tax or legal purposes, and after this point, it is destroyed or rendered unreadable. Our Privacy Policy also outlines the electronic and administrative safeguards designed to make the information we collect secure.

4) Improve the manner and extent to which users can access and download their information.

Our Privacy Policy states that we are happy to help our customers review and correct the personal information we have associated with their accounts and billing records. It provides contact information for customers wishing to conduct such a review. Additionally, we continue to explore ways to effectively communicate with our customers about privacy and to improve our users' experience.

5) Articulate how freedom of expression or privacy-related grievances are reported and addressed.

AT&T has explored, along with other members of the Telecommunications Industry Dialogue, how companies should approach complaints or grievances relating to users' freedom of expression and privacy rights. A summary of the group's work on this topic can be found in its [2015 Annual Report](#). As discussed in that report, AT&T and its counterparts rarely receive complaints that company operations have negatively affected users' freedom of expression or privacy rights.

For its own part, AT&T has procedures in place for receiving, escalating, and responding to complaints from customers that may raise a variety of issues, including freedom of expression and privacy. For example, AT&T's [Privacy Policy](#) invites users to send their questions to a dedicated privacy mailbox. Our [Terms of Service](#) also invite complaints to the company's customer service department and provide for resolution of any disputes *arising out of, or relating to, any aspect of our relationship with our customers*. (See para. 13.) These complaint procedures are available to customers with a broad range of complaints, including those relating to privacy or freedom of expression.

Peter Micek
Access Now
July 1, 2016

The company also engages with civil society organizations, including Access Now, that focus on freedom of expression and privacy rights. These organizations bring policy concerns to the company's attention. The input that AT&T receives through these interactions influences its policies and its approach to respecting the freedom of expression and privacy of users.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the issues you raised. Please let us know if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Very truly yours,

Jeff Dygert

Jeffrey H. Dygert
Executive Director, Public Policy