

## FORTUNE

# People Have Asked Google to Remove 2.4 Million Links About Them. Here's What They Want to Forget

By DAVID MEYER February 28, 2018

Google has released one of its periodic updates on how it deals with Europe's so-called "right to be forgotten," but this time it's also put out research that breaks down what personal references people want scrubbed from the search engine.

The [right to be forgotten](#)—which is really a "right to be delisted" from search results—was established by Europe's top court in 2014. The ruling held that Google ([GOOGL](#), [+1.13%](#)) must remove links to material about a person, if that individual asks it to do so, and if the information is "inaccurate, inadequate, irrelevant or excessive."

This right, based on EU privacy law, is useful for people who can't get the offending material itself erased from the internet. As Google said in its latest [transparency report](#), there have been 655,000 requests since the 2014 ruling, demanding the removal of almost 2.5 million links. The company agreed to remove 43.4% of those links (if a European wants to challenge Google's decision, which takes things like the public interest into account, they can complain to their local privacy regulator).

But when people make these requests, what do they want removed? That's what [Google's researchers](#) looked into, and their findings were very interesting.

A third of the links that people wanted taken down were for "social media and directory services that contained personal information," while only a fifth were for news articles and government websites—most of which involved the requester's legal history.

It seems people in Germany and France were particularly keen on nixing links to their social media and directory details, while British and Italian people were three

times more likely than others to target information on news websites.

Overall, people in France, Germany and the U.K. were responsible for just over half of the delisting requests, and a mere 0.25% of the people filing such requests—a thousand individuals—were behind 15% of the requests.

The “right to be forgotten” also seems to be good business for some, as “many of these frequent requesters were law firms and reputation management services.” However, most requests came from private individuals, 5% of whom were kids.

When the right came into effect, many in the media highlighted how it could be abused by people in the public eye. Well, the numbers for that are now out: politicians and government officials asked for almost 34,000 links to be scrubbed from Google’s results, and celebrities and other non-government public figures asked for over 41,000 delistings.

While this may at first seem like a Europe-specific issue, it may not stay that way. The Court of Justice of the European Union, which issued the seminal 2014 ruling, is now also considering [Google’s appeal](#) against a decision by France’s privacy regulator, which thinks all EU right-to-be-forgotten delistings should apply across all of the company’s services worldwide.

The regulator, CNIL, argues that this is the only way to properly ensure that people cannot find the offending information. Google says this is an overextension of European jurisdiction that could lead to countries all over the world trying to apply their national censorship laws internationally.