



Microsoft is defending its right to break into customers' accounts and read their emails.

The company's ability -- and willingness -- to take such an approach became apparent this week. Microsoft (MSFT, Fortune 500) admitted in federal court documents that it forced its way into a blogger's Hotmail account to track down and stop a potentially catastrophic leak of sensitive software. The company says its decision is justified.

From the company's point of view, desperate times call for desperate measures.

"In this case, we took extraordinary actions based on the specific circumstances," said John Frank, one of the company's top lawyers, in a blog post Thursday night.

According to an FBI complaint, Microsoft in 2012 discovered that an ex-employee had leaked proprietary software to an anonymous blogger. Fearing that could empower hackers, Microsoft's lawyers approved emergency "content pulls" of the blogger's accounts to track it down. Company investigators entered the blogger's Hotmail account, then pored over emails and instant messages on Windows Live. The internal investigation led to the arrest on Wednesday of Alex Kibkalo, a former Microsoft employee based in Lebanon.

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