**Sites Feed Personal Details To New Tracking Industry**

from [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703977004575393173432219064.html#articleTabs%3Darticle](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703977004575393173432219064.html)

12.6 (original reading level)

Excerpt from an article by  JULIA ANGWIN and TOM MCGINTY

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The largest U.S. websites are installing new and intrusive consumer-tracking technologies on the computers of people visiting their sites—in some cases, more than 100 tracking tools at a time—a Wall Street Journal investigation has found….

[T]he Journal examined the 50 most popular websites in the U.S. to measure the quantity and capabilities of the "cookies," "beacons" and other trackers installed on a visitor's computer by each site. Together, the 50 sites account for roughly 40% of U.S. page-views.

The 50 sites installed a total of 3,180 tracking files on a test computer used to conduct the study. Only one site, the encyclopedia Wikipedia.org, installed none. Twelve sites, including …Dictionary.com, … Comcast.net and … MSN.com, installed more than 100 tracking tools apiece in the course of the Journal's test.

 Some two-thirds of the tracking tools installed—2,224—came from 131 companies that, for the most part, are in the business of following Internet users to create rich databases of consumer profiles that can be sold. The companies that placed the most such tools were Google Inc., Microsoft. and Quantcast Corp., all of which are in the business of targeting ads at people online….

The state of the art is growing increasingly intrusive, the Journal found. Some tracking files can record a person's keystrokes online and then transmit the text to a data-gathering company that analyzes it for content, tone and clues to a person's social connections. Other tracking files can re-spawn trackers that a person may have deleted.

The ad industry says tracking doesn't violate anyone's privacy because the data sold doesn't identify people by name, and the tracking activity is disclosed in privacy policies. And while many companies are involved in collecting, analyzing and selling the data, they provide a useful service by raising the chance Internet users see ads and information relevant to them personally….

Congress is considering laws to limit tracking. The Federal Trade Commission is developing privacy guidelines for the industry.