Text Alternatives for Reading #1

# Sites Feed Personal Details To New Tracking Industry

from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703977004575393173432219064.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>

By  JULIA ANGWIN and TOM MCGINTY

July 30, 2010

[](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703999304575399492916963232)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.

**On the Web, Children Face Intensive Tracking**

by STEVE STECKLOW / September 17, 2010

From (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703904304575497903523187146.html>)

A Wall Street Journal investigation into online privacy has found that popular children's websites install more tracking technologies on personal computers than do the top websites aimed at adults.

The Journal examined 50 sites popular with U.S. teens and children to see what tracking tools they installed on a test computer. As a group, the sites placed 4,123 "cookies," "beacons" and other pieces of tracking technology. That is 30% more than were found in an analysis of the 50 most popular U.S. sites overall, which are generally aimed at adults.

The most prolific site: Snazzyspace.com, which helps teens customize their social-networking pages, installed 248 tracking tools. Its operator described the site as a "hobby" and said the tracking tools come from advertisers.

Starfall.com, an education site for young children, installed the fewest, five.…

The tiny tracking tools are used by data-collection companies to follow people as they surf the Internet and to build profiles detailing their online activities, which advertisers and others buy. The profiles don't include names, but can include age, tastes, hobbies, shopping habits, race, likelihood to post comments and general location, such as city.



Selling the data is legal, but controversial, especially when it involves young people. Two companies identified by the Journal as selling teen data initially denied doing so. Only when shown evidence that they were offering data for sale—in one case, it was labeled "teeny boppers"—did they confirm it.

…Companies placing the tracking tools say the information they collect is anonymous and mainly used to deliver targeted ads or to gauge ads' effectiveness. They also say they don't collect "personally identifiable information" like names or email addresses and generally don't specifically target children.

Collecting data on minors is regulated, albeit lightly. The only federal restrictions require parental consent to collect names and other personal information of children under 13 in most circumstances. Currently, the Federal Trade Commission is considering whether changes to the law are warranted. No changes are expected before next year. …

# Consumers in the middle of Google-Facebook battle

By Byron Acohido, Scott Martin and Jon Swartz, USA TODAY Updated 1/26/2012 10:34 AM

From (<http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/story/2012-01-25/google-facebook-competition/52796502/1#mainstory>)

Google and Facebook might have finally gotten the average consumer riled up about privacy….Compelled to tap what many experts predict will be the next big Internet mother lode — online advertising — Google and Facebook laid down very big bets, during a week when European regulators are hashing out strict new rules that could prevent much of what the tech giants seek to do.

Google signaled its intent to begin correlating data about its users' activities across all of its most popular services and across multiple devices. The goal: to deliver those richer behavior profiles to advertisers. Likewise, Facebook announced it will soon make Timeline the new, more glitzy user interface for its service, mandatory. Timeline is designed to chronologically assemble, automatically display and make globally accessible the preferences, acquaintances and activities for most of Facebook's 800 million members.

Google and Facebook have repeatedly insisted that the changes are intended strictly to improve users' experiences….

Meanwhile, a high-stakes lobbying effort is unfolding in Washington aimed at shaping policies favorable to [U.S.](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/U.S) tech companies and blunting any potential move to follow Europe's more conservative proposals to limiting online tracking by companies….

The driver: advertising revenue. The global online advertising market is expected to swell to $132 billion by 2015, up from $80 billion this year, according to eMarketer. Google and Facebook are putting their abilities to index individuals' online activity and behaviors into high gear to tap into this market, analysts say.

"If they can make the ads more relevant, the logic goes, they can increase the number of advertisers and the price they can charge per click (on each ad)," says Alex Daley, chief investment strategist at Casey Research. "Because the click will be from more qualified leads — customers who are more interested in the product — they can grow the revenue base."

But security analysts, privacy advocates and technologists say consumers probably should be very concerned. While making richer behavioral data more readily available to advertisers, Google's new data-correlating practices and Facebook's new Timeline and Open Graph, a more powerful way to express preferences on third-party websites, also tend to aid and abet more unsavory uses.

Richer personal details are very beneficial to identity thieves and cyberspies, as well as to parties motivated to use such data unfairly against consumers, such as insurance companies, prospective employers, political campaigners and, lately, hacktivists, security analysts say.