

AM I BEING TRACKED?



TECH TIPS

By Joseph Awe, President, TechBldrs, Inc.

Am I being tracked? Yes. Everything you do on the Internet is being watched, by multiple companies. Everything you access from your phone is being watched by Google and Apple. Law enforcement can ask, and with a warrant, get the information collected on you. And if you are like over 87 percent of male and 29 percent of female internet users, you may be embarrassed at what they uncover.

Why are they tracking me?

Well, most of the time, you get "free" services like GPS, or finding the nearest gas station. But free to you also means you freely gave up your rights to have all your behavior data harvested. Things like, what you click, what you say to Siri or Google Assistant, what you like, who your friends are, how long you read a screen, how many times you watch a video, where you navigate too ... Yeah, pretty much everything. All the harvested data was the price you paid for the free services you love. You also get more targeted emails, ads and feeds from all the "free" apps you use including Facebook, Instagram, Linked-in, Reddit, etc. Most people feel like they are immune to it, but with over 5.2 billion Internet users, you only need 0.001% to get five million users.

Do they have ESP or Clairvoyance?

When these multi-billion-dollar corporations collect all that data, they don't need to sell the data; they use it to make a cyber voodoo doll of each and every person. And having billions of these cyber voodoo dolls, and a really smart, always learning A.I. engine, they can predict what you may ask for next,

based on best probability. As their A.I. engine gets super smart, they sell the predictability to companies who are trying to sell stuff.

It is almost as if they know what you are looking for, before you know you are looking for it. Cool, but creepy.

So how do you slow down the tracking?

- Chrome not Google. Did you know that what most people call Google is two separate things? There's Chrome, the web browser, and Google, the search engine (the master at tracking you). I use DuckDuckGo or Qwant as my search engine. You can use either of these even when you are using Microsoft Edge, which is built on the same engine Chrome is built on, known as Chromium.
- Use Private / Incognito browsing so when you are looking at things you don't want your kids, spouse or co-workers to find...
- Chrome is good, Firefox is better. From a privacy and ad blocking perspective, Firefox works better out of the box. Add to that the ad blockers, and it's now my browser of choice on my computer and phone.

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TECH TIPS

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• Stop using "free" email. If you mind giving all your email content to a large giant like Google, Verizon or Comcast, think of paying \$5 month for Microsoft Office 365 Basic. If that's too steep, I would trust Outlook.com over Gmail.com for private emails.

• Stop signing into Social Media. You only need a social media account if you want to post something. Well, if you do, then forget your privacy. There's no such thing as an anonymous posting. For me, if I just need a laugh once in a while (or every time I sit in the can), I use services that do not require me to sign on.

Rather than using an app on the phone, I setup Firefox on my phone to have short cut links to the Social Media search sites. Here are some:

Facebook: Type Facebook.com followed by a phrase you are looking for, like "FaceBook.com/422 Business Advisor". The search engines will get you right to the page.

Instagram: Go to Fullinsta.photo and search account.

Twitter: Go directly to Twitter's search page <https://twitter.com/explorer> and search for what you need.

Reddit: This one is an app. Use the Boost App on your phone to navigate Reddit. No logins required.

Lastly, News should come from unbiased news sources. Google News tracks you. CNN tracks you. Fox News tracks you. All the click-bait at the bottom of the news pages track you, but AP News does not. The Associated Press, the non-profit news agency, that gets reposted everywhere, has minimal slant bias and sticks to the facts.

So, remember, free means the service providers get to use your data for ... free. Alright Neo ... Red pill or Blue pill?

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