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How to Prevent Online Companies from Collecting Your Data

Our Friends · Thursday, July 2nd, 2020

For tech companies the world over, data is big business. In the 21st century, data has turned into a resource around which many business models tend to center.

If you wonder why so many big websites which are free to use (in terms of the basic services that they offer) are worth so much, it's data that makes them rich. Google and Facebook, for example, use the data generated from your online activity on their websites – and on other websites that you might be browsing – and make money from it through advertising. In the second quarter of 2019, Google's advertising department made 32.6 billion dollars, while Facebook reported 16.6 billion dollars.

Before we look at how to prevent companies like these from collecting your data, we need to know how they use your data in the first place.

Why Do Big Companies Collect Your Data?

Data Can Be Analyzed for Sales and Marketing

It's all about advertising. Big companies want your data so they know how you behave, think, decisions, what you like, what you don't like, and what your future plans are. Any publicly available data that exists is on the internet, available for anyone – not just big companies – to mine. Nuwber is a good place to start if you want to see what information relating to you is immediately accessible.

Data is used for marketing and advertising purposes – this is not a novel idea. The internet, however, has made it possible to collect this data from billions of users worldwide, creating a staggering amount of information that can be up for analysis so that big companies know how to advertise better and who to market to.

Your Data Is Sold to Third-Party Companies

If something has value, it's got demand, and it can bring a price. Since your data reveals so much about your behavior and thinking online, it's got value for companies who are ready to pay for it.

Your data is worth billions, but you probably weren't even aware that this has been happening. Often, when creating a new account or logging into your favorite social media platform or online store, you've agreed to your data being sold but were not aware of it. You agreed to this, but did

not realize it.

Read That User Agreement and Terms of Service

Always read the User Agreement when signing up to a website. As mentioned above, you've probably agreed to websites collecting and selling your data without knowing what you've done. Most websites tell you that the information you share with them will be collected and possibly sold, but it's buried deep in the User Agreement or Terms of Service document. Beat the laziness and change your habits by reading these before ticking the "I Agree" box. This is a good start to prevent online companies from collecting data about you.

Use Privacy Extensions

A good way to start keeping your information to yourself while working online is by searching for a browser extension that focuses on privacy. Since many websites, like Facebook, track your browsing history, these privacy extensions give you a helping hand and stop sites from tracking you and mining your information.

Delete Cookies Regularly

How do sites track you while you browse other sites? Trackers, like cookies, save your behavior online. You're probably familiar with the word "cookies" since many sites give you the option to accept them as you browse. These cookies are saved onto your device and serve as an identification marker, often storing more information about you and sharing that data with the website from where it originated. Ensure that you delete cookies in your browser regularly.

Use a Search Engine that Doesn't Track You

Along with using a VPN, using a search engine like DuckDuckGo and Startpage is a great option if you want to keep your data to yourself. These search engines do not save information about their users, so your data is not sold to the highest bidder.

Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

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