

Twitter offers personalized advice on whom to follow

May 18 2012, By Michelle Maltais

Twitter wants to guide new hatchlings as they venture out of the virtual nest with its experimental tailored suggestions of whom to follow. This personalization comes on the heels of the company's confirming that users also have the option to beg off having their online movements followed for such personalization.

"Today's experiment in providing tailored suggestions lets novice [users](#) go from zero to pro faster and more easily than ever before," wrote Othman Laraki, Twitter's director of global growth.

Earlier in the day, at an Internet Week panel in New York, the Federal Trade Commission's chief tech officer Ed Felten revealed that Twitter supports Mozilla's efforts to allow users more control over which sites track their moves online. (Websites themselves have the choice of whether to opt in to the effort, so not every site has agreed to turn off its cookies when you pop by.)

Twitter said it is basing the suggestions on accounts other users follow and on visits to websites in the "Twitter ecosystem," including sites with integrated Twitter buttons or [widgets](#). That includes sites such as latimes.com, which has a "tweet" button over nearly every story. In essence, where you go - if there's a Twitter button or widget - helps Twitter form recommendations for other users.

So it's a choice here, as with most online hangouts, for privacy or personalization.

If you want to wander the Web without tracking - that is, where you are given the option to opt out - Windows users should go to Firefox's Tools menu, then Options, then Privacy. There, check the box beside "Tell websites I do not want to be tracked." Mac users should click on the Firefox pull-down menu, then Preferences, then Privacy and check the same box.

Felton in his remarks gave an early nod to Twitter's pending announcement about the tailored suggestions, which affirmed users' ability to opt out through the Do Not Track feature.

"This will be a good example of Do Not Track feature that doesn't involve advertising but involves other user-facing features," he said, according to transcript provided to The Times. "And it is interesting because how one particular company will be fitting Do Not Track into a broader strategy for providing transparency and choice about data practices."

New Twitter users will see an option to "tailor [Twitter](#) based on my recent website visits" when they create an account on the site. Current users will see a new "Personalization" section in settings with the same option to personalize suggestions.

The site says users can disable the personalization at your discretion, "which will stop the collection of information for the feature and remove any tailored suggestions we have for you."

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