

Amazon is watching, listening and tracking you. Here's how to stop it

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Amazon is not only watching over your shopping, TV viewing, music listening and book reading histories, it's also listening to you at home or in the car.

At least that's how it is in my household, where I have two Amazon Echo speakers—one in the kitchen and another in the garage, plus a car accessory to bring the Alexa personal assistant along with me on drives. I don't have a lot of smart home devices, but if I did, Amazon would have access to my doorbell and security—who's coming and going—and more.

Unlike Facebook and Google, which slyly follow you around on your mobile phone and elsewhere to slip in more product sells, even if you're not using their apps, Amazon is rather upfront about the information it collects, even if it's hidden in several pages of a help menu.

In a nutshell, if you want to make use of the Internet's most popular shopping destination, you need to feed the beast. You need to let it remember what items you've shopped for and know the kinds of products you like.

(Your entertainment habits and interaction with the Alexa personal assistant are another story. More on them in a minute.)

What you don't need to do is allow Amazon to hit you with personalized ads. Beyond selling merchandise, Amazon has also forged a lucrative sideline in selling ads to manufacturers who want to reach you while shopping. The company reaped some \$2.7 billion in ad revenue in the most sales quarter.

To ditch the personalized ads, which tend to follow you around the Web and on mobile, Amazon offers that feature here by going to the ad prefs section of Amazon's Help pages.

But the endless offers won't end for you. Even if you click the buttons asking Amazon to stop, you may receive personalized product recommendations and other similar features on Amazon.com and its

affiliated sites, says the e-tailer. "You may also receive ads provided by Amazon.com on other websites; they just won't be personalized."

You can take several steps to stop the Amazon ads from following you around the web after you've searched and moved on.

How to stop Amazon ads from tracking you

First of all, Amazon's tracking defense is that by knowing your location, it can deliver products to your home faster. "For example, if we know your preferred shipping location, the specificity of our predictable shipping is really amazing," Amazon said in a statement. "Customers may see a message like, 'if you order in the next 2:27 minutes, you will get this by tomorrow.'"

To stop Amazon tracking, begin by wiping out your browser histories. This setting is in tools; in Chrome, you click the three dots in the top right corner, go to More Tools, then Clear Browsing Data. This click will wipe out your browsing history, stored passwords and cookies. You'll have a lot to input again after you do this. For instance, stored URLs and sign-ons will be wiped clean. So make sure you know your passwords or have them stored somewhere else before you do it.

You can also delete your browsing history on Amazon.

Like most websites, Amazon wants to leave a "cookie" in your browser, for tracking purposes. Browsers have tools to delete cookies, but should you do so, Amazon will be inoperable for shoppers. "You will not be able to add items to your Shopping Cart, proceed to Checkout, or use any Amazon.com products and services that require you to Sign in," says Amazon.

Unlike Facebook and Google, Amazon doesn't monitor your every

movement in the real world. Its interest is how you shop and entertain yourself, but it notes that you can disable location access on your smartphones in the settings section.

Amazon's big ears are all over your computer and [mobile phone](#) clicks. While you're at home, it's all about potentially listening and noting your viewing tastes via the Alexa and Fire TV products.

Unlike Facebook, where many people believe, despite the social network's denials, that it listens in on conversations, Amazon freely admits it does—as long as you say the Alexa wake word.

Amazon stores recordings of every interaction you've had with Alexa, available for listening in the [smartphone app](#), available by clicking Settings and Alexa Privacy.

There, you can read and listen to your past conversations with Alexa, delete all or individual recordings. You can also have Alexa do it, by saying, "Alexa, delete everything I said today."

Amazon insists that it doesn't willfully listen to you at home, only when you use the wake word. But in reviewing my history, I found many instances where it did record oddball phrases without the wake word. Everything from "Go 101 South for 1 mile," from the Waze instruction in the car to a line from a podcast I was listening to: "I know exactly who (the late actor) Ben Gazzara was." And recorded snippets of a U.S. TODAY staff meeting were recently recorded in which the wake word was never uttered.

Amazon got some bad press earlier this year when Bloomberg reported that thousands of Amazon workers were employed to listen to Echo recordings.

"We only annotate a fraction of one percent of voice interactions from a random set of customers in order to improve the customer experience," Amazon said, in a statement.

Meanwhile, Amazon monitors your music, book and TV/movie selections via the Music, Kindle, Audible and Prime Video apps to make better recommendations, says the company.

But if you have a Fire TV streaming stick, or the Fire TV Amazon-branded TVs from Toshiba or Insignia, Amazon also wants to throw some targeted ads at you—unless you change your settings. (You can go the Settings section of the Fire TV app and TV to opt out and decline having more ads pushed to you.)

"If you opt-out of interest-based ads on this device," the message reads, "apps will be instructed not to use the advertising ID to build profiles for advertising purposes or target you with interest-based ads on this device."

Amazon declined to comment.

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