

Microsoft's privacy-by-default in IE10 sparks opposition

4 June 2012, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org) -- The Internet browser headache in having to initiate an opt-out exit from advertisers who keep landing on your pages because they think they have a plausible target has turned a corner. Microsoft has moved to turn the practice upside down, or rather inside out. Users will have to opt-in to invite advertisers in the latest version of Internet Explorer, IE10. Microsoft has made the 'Do Not Track' feature, which stops companies from being able to trace a user's web behavior, the default setting. In doing so, Microsoft has made IE10 the only web browser to present the tracking feature as an opt-in, not an opt-out, proposition.

In announcing the on-default DNT policy for IE10 in Windows 8, Brandon Lynch, the Chief Privacy Officer of the company, said the move was inspired by the FTC's work in calling on both technology and [advertising](#) sectors to come up with a uniform mechanism for online behavioral targeting of ads. Also taking the message forward, the corporate vice president of Internet Explorer, Dean Hachamovitch, said a Windows user experience that is 'private by default' arrives at a time when so much user data is collected online. "We think it is progress and that consumers will favor products

designed with their privacy in mind over products that are designed primarily to gather their data," he stated.

Not surprisingly, news of consumers to experience private by default in their IE browsers fell like a breath of fresh air for greater-privacy supporters and like a ton of bricks for advertisers. The question being posed is whether or not other browser groups will do the same as [Microsoft](#). The sentiment among those against the move is that the decision comes in an already ailing economy, where the move could deal a blow to advertising networks counting on the efficacy of personalized, targeted ads.

Voicing its opposition, the Association of National Advertisers issued a statement that Microsoft, in making that decision, had acted "irresponsibly." The association referred to Microsoft's "unilateral decision" to embed 'Do Not Track' functionality in version 10 of its IE browser with a default setting in the on versus off position. The Association, which has a membership of 450 companies, raised the argument that the decision "removes choice by preventing consumers from experiencing interest-based advertising and making an informed decision about its benefits, the result of which will be untargeted, irrelevant online advertising."

Microsoft looks forward to other industry leaders making the same kind of move, nonetheless. "We also know from experiences - such as the P3P standard recommended by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) - that initiatives to advance privacy are much less effective if other industry leaders don't join in adopting the approach," said Lynch.

DNT is optional; websites don't need to support it. Wariness about user-behavior tracking, and now the idea of DNT by default, are likely to raise noise around this issue. Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) who co-sponsored the Do Not Track Kids Act of

2011 along with Joe Barton (R-TX), has called the decision "an important first step towards greater privacy protections for consumers," but he wants to see some next steps too. "It is my hope that Microsoft and other companies will go further in the future, so that Do Not Track also means 'Do Not Collect', giving consumers the ability to say no to both targeted advertising and collection of their personal data."

IE10 will be the browser on Windows 8, due for general release later this year.

More information: ie.microsoft.com/testdrive/

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