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ReferrAI Introduces the AI Origin Protocol to Bring Transparency to AI-Driven Commerce and Content Influence

New open standard enables AI platforms to share intent and efficacy signals with retailers and publishers, without tracking users or creating identity systems

New York, NY, ReferrAI, an open-source community stewarding neutral infrastructure for AI origin and referral transparency, today announced the release of the AI Origin Protocol (AIOP), a privacy-safe, open specification for documenting where AI-driven outcomes originate, with an initial focus on AI-driven commerce intent.

As AI systems increasingly influence how people discover products, content, and services, the ecosystem lacks a neutral and consistent way for AI platforms to communicate intent and efficacy signals to downstream participants, including retailers and publishers, without relying on cookies, cross-site tracking, or new identity mechanisms.

The AI Origin Protocol addresses this gap by defining a lightweight, cryptographically signed origin signal that AI platforms can transmit to retailers and publishers to document the origin and context of AI-driven outcomes. The protocol does not identify users, persist sessions, or define economic relationships. Instead, it provides a verifiable, privacy-first mechanism for transparency.

“AIOP is not an attribution system and it is not a monetization platform,” said the ReferrAI community in a statement. “It is a neutral way for AI platforms to disclose where AI-driven intent originated and how AI recommendations performed in aggregate, without introducing tracking or identity.”

The AI Origin Protocol is open source, licensed under Apache-2.0, and designed to complement existing advertising, retail media, and provenance standards. ReferrAI invites AI platforms, retailers, publishers, and standards bodies to participate in its development.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. What problem is the AI Origin Protocol trying to solve?

AI platforms are becoming a primary interface for discovery and decision-making, but today there is no standard way for AI systems to communicate origin, intent, and efficacy signals to the broader ecosystem in a privacy-safe way.

Specifically:

- Retailers lack visibility into AI-driven demand
- Publishers lack transparency into how their content influences AI outcomes
- AI platforms lack a neutral disclosure mechanism
- Existing solutions rely on tracking or identity
- AIOP provides a common, privacy-first origin layer.

2. What does “AI origin” mean in this context?

- AI origin answers two narrow questions:
- Where did this AI-driven outcome originate?
- What AI experience or surface influenced it?
- Optionally, it can support aggregate efficacy signals, such as
- Whether AI-driven recommendations resulted in engagement or conversion
- How AI-originated traffic performs at a high level

It does not answer:

- Who the user is
- How credit should be assigned
- How money should flow

3. Who sends and receives AIOP signals?

- AI platforms are the primary issuers of AIOP signals.

- Signals may be sent to:
- Retailers, to document AI-driven intent and outcomes
- Publishers, to document when their content influenced AI recommendations
- Platforms or analytics systems, for aggregate measurement and disclosure
- Each recipient chooses how ,or whether ,to use the signal.

4. How does AIOP work at a high level?

- An AI platform generates an outcome (e.g., a recommendation or referral)
- A short-lived, signed origin token is created
- The token is transmitted to a retailer, publisher, or both
- The recipient validates the token and logs origin
- Optional, aggregate efficacy signals may be produced
- At no point does the protocol identify or track a user.

5. Why is this needed now?

Three industry shifts are converging:

- AI interfaces are replacing search, browsing, and referrals
- Privacy regulation and platform changes are eliminating identity-based tracking
- Publishers and retailers need transparency without surveillance
- Without a new primitive, the ecosystem risks either opacity, or recreating tracking under a different name
- AIOP provides a third path.

6. How is this different from attribution systems?

- Attribution systems attempt to assign credit.
- AIOP documents origin and context.

It does not:

- Rank influence
- Apply weights
- Declare winners
- Enforce outcomes

Those decisions, if desired, belong to downstream policies, not the protocol.

7. Does AIOP track users or sessions?

No.

AIOP:

- Contains zero PII
- Uses short-lived tokens
- Does not persist identifier
- Does not enable cross-site or cross-session tracking
- This is a hard constraint of the protocol.

8. Does AIOP enable publisher compensation or “vig” models?

- AIOP does not define payments, pricing, or compensation.
- However, documented AI origin and aggregate efficacy signals may support downstream use cases, such as:
- Publisher transparency
- Reporting and disclosures
- Voluntary compensation or licensing policies
- The protocol itself remains neutral and non-economic.

9. How does AIOP relate to affiliate marketing?

- Affiliate systems were designed for web redirects and deterministic clicks.
- AIOP is designed for AI-driven outcomes, where influence may be indirect, conversational, or non-click-based.
- AIOP does not replace affiliate networks.
- It provides an upstream origin signal that systems may choose to incorporate.

10. How does AIOP relate to AdCP?

- They operate at different layers:
- AdCP orchestrates advertising workflows and agentic media buying
- AIOP documents AI origin and efficacy upstream of activation

- They are complementary, not competitive.

11. Who governs the AI Origin Protocol?

- AIOP is stewarded by ReferrAI, an open-source community.

ReferrAI:

- Is not a company
- Does not operate a commercial product
- Does not monetize the protocol
- Develops in the open on GitHub
- Long-term governance may transition to a neutral standards body.

12. Who benefits from AIOP?

- AI platforms gain a neutral disclosure mechanism
- Retailers gain visibility into AI-driven demand
- Publishers gain insight into AI influence and efficacy
- Regulators gain transparency without new tracking vectors

13. What are the explicit non-goals?

AIOP does not aim to:

- Track users
- Create identity systems
- Guarantee attribution
- Define payments or revenue sharing
- Replace ad platforms, RMNs, or clean rooms
- These constraints are intentional.

14. What does success look like?

- Success looks like AIOP becoming:
- A quiet, trusted origin primitive
- Easy to adopt
- Hard to misuse

- Invisible to users

If AIOP fades into infrastructure, it has succeeded.