The Cookie Monster

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I listened to “[The history and future of the cookie](https://www.npr.org/2022/11/18/1137657496/third-party-cookie-data-tracking-internet-user-privacy)”, a podcast on a core feature of the web. Cookies were created by a young and ambitious man to solve a simple, incredibly important problem: how does the web make money?

Lou Montulli left school to work at Netscape. He and his colleagues came to the conclusion that, to stop one power (Microsoft) from monopolizing the web, it had to expand in its usages. The path to expand was plotted through commerce. Commerce already existed on the web but was inefficient. Nothing remembered you, specifically, what you interacted with. Reload a webpage and you were a new person. Want to order numerous items from the same online shop? Can’t do it. There was no “shopping cart” because there was no way for the webpage to recall what you put into it. The solution Lou came up with was a unique digital tag that could be attached to a user. That way any site would remember them as they searched around the web. It is here where we are fortunate. Lou had a conscious, he envisioned a bigger, better web and knew that anonymity was part of that. To that end he built in measures to ensure that tracking would be difficult.

Certainly, due in part to cookies, Netscape’s browser launched in 1994 and became massively popular, with all others following suite in developing their own cookies. A company by the name of Double click grabbed onto these cookies as a way to track users across different pages, gathering information on them in order to better target ads to them. This concerned Lou, who saw the writing on the wall. He had the option of disabling cookies across 90% of the entire web at the time. After mulling it over he concluded that to do that would be to destroy most monetization on the internet, making it susceptible to monopolization once again. He added in an option to disable or reject cookies whenever a site wanted to plant them on you. Allowing a user to choose anonymity or convenience.

Its creepy when Facebook ads recommend me things I’ve never searched up, only TALKED about. The thought is always in the back of your mind, what ELSE could this be used for? How much of what I type, or even say, is stored away in a database? What do the big internet companies know about me, and how much is sold without my knowledge? Its an uneasy feeling knowing parts of you are floating around out there. As of right now, as far as we are aware, none of this information is used for harmful purposes. Only the banal evil that is marketing.

This is, however, a necessary evil. The heart of the issue is that to remove what cookies do would destroy the internet as we’ve known it for 30 years. Ecommerce would die overnight. At this point, how would cookies even be removed? I do not see Google or Facebook developing a conscious any time soon after multiple bouts in court due to selling user data. (Least of all a non-synthetic one!) Would we even want cookies removed? The only reason the internet is a large and successful as it is today, is because of how profitable it is. Remove the best way for people to make money and the internet as we know it crumbles overnight. The service cookies is needed. The same tracking tech used for targeted ads is what makes all this possible for the majority of people.

Moreover, you could never truly ”disable cookies” so to speak. Cookies and their service may come at a cost but when you consider the repercussions removing them would entail, a replacement cookie would pop up very quickly. Amazon is reportedly the U.S’s largest ecommerce site and netted 470 BILLION dollars in 2021, Amazon is used from the individual level to mass corporations using their services. Not only would you not be able to buy home gadgetry at your fingertips anymore; MANY companies would be scrambling to find a general wholesale supplier again. Everything from paper towels, to hand trucks, and even *asphalt grinders*… they sell so many products in so many categories Amazon alone would need to patch up a cookie replacement to keep a sizable corner of the ecommerce market from tanking.

Plus, what are cookies used for primarily to make money with besides storing your cart for Bezos? Ads. The online Porn industry is valued at 97 BILLION dollars globally (more than all of professional sports net worths’ *combined*), but that money isn’t just attributed to actors or only fans, that money is mainly raked in by ads which are made possible by the cookie. So, if cookies tank, many “free” porn sites will too. If Amazon hasn’t already planned a back-up cookie, Pornhub has.

These replacement cookies are already in practice for many companies. Both Google and Apple have instated (or tried to) their own version of the cookie. Publicly they stated it was for a greater good and collection of user data was wrong but when you peeked at the source, some are fundamentally worse. The data may as well have been sold as soon as collected. One of them adds cookies onto your browser without asking permission, as legally, permission was “given” by logging on to the cite.

Cookies on the web are kind of similar to the real deal, they’re sweet and have a consciously good purpose. But when you look at them harshly and read the nutritional labels you wonder if you really need them, but your diabetic anyways.