

Week 16: Third party tracking

September 19, 8:30 am Pacific/11:30 am Eastern

Overview

Advertising trackers are everywhere on the web -- as we've discussed, this is the business model of the internet. This week, Eric Hellman of the Free Ebook Foundation will discuss the technical details behind third-party tracking on the internet -- how ads work, how web pages get built, what information flows where, why this matters and what we can do about it.

Learning objectives

- Learn what's happening behind the scenes of internet advertising
- Learn about how ads and other third party trackers collect our data
- Learn what we can do to protect ourselves from tracking

Readings

FCC approves TV technology that gives better pictures but less privacy:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-television-technology/fcc-approves-tv-technology-that-gives-better-pictures-but-less-privacy-idUSKBN1DG2XF>

Staggering variety of clandestine trackers found in popular Android apps:

<https://theintercept.com/2017/11/24/staggering-variety-of-clandestine-trackers-found-in-popular-android-apps/>

How companies learn your secrets:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/magazine/shopping-habits.html>

Venmo is trying to identify me as a Communist for buying a Cuban sandwich:

<https://twitter.com/existentialpink/status/948282677391712256>

Reply-All's episode about Facebook spying:

<https://www.gimletmedia.com/reply-all/109-facebook-spying>

Roomba's next big step is selling maps of your home to the highest bidder:

<https://gizmodo.com/roombas-next-big-step-is-selling-maps-of-your-home-to-t-1797187829>

Your Samsung TV is eavesdropping on your private conversations:

<http://money.cnn.com/2015/02/09/technology/security/samsung-smart-tv-privacy/index.html>

Unroll.me faces backlash over a widespread practice: selling user data:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/technology/personal-data-firm-slice-unroll-me-backlash-unroll-me.html>

Beware of ads that use inaudible sound to link our phone, tv, tablet and PC:

<https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2015/11/beware-of-ads-that-use-inaudible-sound-to-link-your-phone-tv-tablet-and-pc/>

"God View": Uber allegedly stalked users for party-goers viewing pleasure:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/10/03/god-view-uber-allegedly-stalked-users-for-party-goers-viewing-pleasure/#568af4713141>

Guest lecturer

Eric Hellman, Free Ebook Foundation: <https://ebookfoundation.org/>

Discussion

- What did you learn this week?
- How would you discuss these technical details of third-party tracking with patrons?
- How can we make our websites and public PCs safer from third-party tracking?
- What about some of the tracking practices that use other kinds of data, like the stories about Roomba, Uber, and Samsung TVs?

Assignment

- Download one of the third-party tracker blockers. Here is a list of some of them:
 - Privacy Badger: <https://www.eff.org/privacybadger>
 - Lightbeam for Firefox (not actually a blocker, just identifies trackers): <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/lightbeam/>
 - 1Blocker ad-blocker for iOS devices: <https://backstage.1blocker.com/say-hello-to-1blocker-x-8b55efe1ae36>
- Then, write a comparison of two different tracker-blockers/ad-blockers, or incorporate one into privacy class curricula (either as part of a slidedeck or curriculum you're already working on, or alone).
- If this doesn't fit into what you're doing for your final assignment, incorporate this week's information into that final assignment in your own way.