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By Kate Cox | @kcoxdc

BLOCKING THE BLOCKERS

BLOCKED **AD BLOCKERS** GOOGLE CHROME **AD NAUSEAM**

BADVERTISING ADVERTISING

and privacy advocates, but they're now commonplace. Every major browser app lets you run plug-ins or extensions that can banish unsightly, privacycompromising ads from your sight, and these browsers generally stay out of the escalating war between ad-blocking users and ad-blocker-blocking sites. Yet, the makers of one ad-blocker say Google has thrown their app out of the Chrome store, and disabled the service's function in Chrome for all users. So what gives? The plugin is called AdNauseam, and it claims on its website to be a "not-for-

Ad-blockers might have started out as kind of a weird niche thing for techies

profit, research-based privacy tool." In a statement on its site, AdNauseam developers allege that Google utterly banned it from the Chrome Web Store as of January 1. Additionally, thanks to a policy change Google enacted back in 2014, extensions

that are removed from the Chrome Web Store are also removed from existing Chrome installations for users. That means that if you're using something like AdNauseam, and it gets banned from the store, then the next time you connect Chrome on your computer to the internet the extension will be removed from your PC, too. That policy change, Google has said, was intended to help Windows users get malicious or unwanted extensions off of their computers. In 2015, a year after

largely effective, making customer support requests for uninstalling unwanted extensions drop by 75%. At that point, Google expanded its policy to cover Mac users too. So when Google pulled AdNauseam from the Chrome Store at the start of 2017,

the policy went into effect, Google wrote in a blog post that it had proven

the extension didn't just become unavailable for new users to download; it suddenly deactivated itself on all existing users' computers, too. The AdNauseam development team wrote to Google to ask why it had been

banned. In an e-mail that the developers shared with Consumerist, Google

uninstall them separately.

wrote that AdNauseam was out of compliance with a section of policy stating:

An extension should have a single purpose that is clear to users. Do not create an extension that requires users to accept bundles of unrelated functionality, such as an email notifier and a news headline aggregator. If two pieces of functionality are clearly separate, they should be put into two different extensions, and users should have the ability to install and

For example, an extension that provides a broad array of functionalities on the New Tab Page/ Start-up Page but also changes the default search are better delivered as separate extensions, so that users can select the services they want.

malware" to the more accurate "block malicious ads." However, AdNauseam's developers feel that the extension serves a clear and stated purpose, and that Google's stance does not justify the extension's removal from the Chrome Web Store.

In response, the software developers changed their description from "blocking

But what makes AdNauseam different from all the other ad-blockers still readily and easily available through the Chrome store?

The issue may be that it works a little differently than your standard ad-blocker does: instead of just blocking the advertisements and trackers from rendering on any site you view, it also virtually "clicks" on them -all of them. The idea is basically to poison the well: by generating such a high level of noise, it makes the signal-to-noise ratio untenable, and renders tracking beacons and addelivery cookies moot.

between 40,000 and 60,000 users have downloaded the tool, according to the tool's lead designer, Mushon Zer-Aviv, who added that AdNauseam has seen a "spike in downloads" for Opera and Firefox users in recent days, and that their numbers don't show manual installations.

That costs advertisers money, and it's meant to, Zer-Aviv, tells Consumerist. In

As of the time Chrome pulled the extension from its web store, somewhere

an email, Zer-Aviv said that AdNauseam is "definitely an activist tool" that intentionally and deliberately is "trying to show that this hostile disrespect for online privacy would be met with hostility on the part of the users." Tracking and surveillance are indeed pervasive online; we've all seen a flight we

thought about booking, or a pair of shoes we thought about buying, seemingly follow us across the internet for a few weeks, even across devices. From "supercookies" to beacons, audio tracing, and other kinds of fingerprinting, your device is a known quantity that is tied to you and advertised to heavily. That, according to Zer-Aviv, is completely unfair. "Online surveillance by third

Aviv says. So AdNauseam exists to make "data collection, analysis and monitoring" literally more expensive. "We want to raise the costs of the unethical surveillance advertising business

model at least until this industry respects pro-consumer privacy initiatives such

as the Do Not Track standard," Zer-Aviv tells Consumerist.

party trackers is a blunt exploitation of the way the web was constructed," Zer-

Do not track has, as Zer-Aviv notes, proven ineffective. Although the setting was introduced in 2012, the first attempts to standardize it left it at opt-in only, rather than making it a default, and the FCC has since declined to make internet companies listen when you specify you don't want to be tracked.

And that, Zer-Aviv thinks, is why his team's tool was pulled from Chrome. "Google wasn't even honest enough to admit it blocked a political protest that challenged its commercial interests at the expense of users privacy and autonomy," Zer-Aviv tells us. "They just claim we shouldn't do 'more than one thing' and they don't even say what is 'the other thing' they claim AdNauseam is doing."

He continues, "If Google would admit the true reasons for the takedown, or even change the Terms of Use of their browser to kick us out, at least we will be able to have an honest conversation about the consequences for using Chrome — it is exactly like seeing the world through Google Glass, and allowing Google to block whatever threatens its bottom line from our view."

Today, however, a search of the Chrome Web Store for "ad block" returns about

two dozen results, each of which definitely interferes with Google's ad-based revenue streams in some way. Some even explicitly promise to work on YouTube, Google's streaming-video behemoth. We reached out to Google for clarification about AdNauseam's disappearance from the Chrome store. A representative for the company confirmed that the

extension was deemed to be in violation of Chrome's "single-purpose policy," an excerpt of which was sent to the development team in the e-mail noted above. The representative also directed us to a Google blog post from 2013 explaining the purpose of the policy. Specifically, Google maintains the stance that the entire intent of the Chrome

ecosystem is to keep things simple, streamlined, and speedy. As a way to meet

that goal, Google wrote at the time, "We decided to take a different approach:

Chrome extensions would be simple and single-purpose in nature, and each would only be allowed a single visible UI 'surface' in Chrome." Since AdNauseam intentionally does several things at once to meet its mandate both hiding and clicking ads for you — that violates the single-use policy,

However, Google's representative added to Consumerist that, "Our developer outreach team has been in touch with the developer to help them resubmit their extension to get included back in the store." Was this helpful? We're a non-profit! You can get

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