How to make yourself 'digitally invisible': Researchers reveal the best way to stop snoopers tracking you in the on AND offline world

'Obfuscation' educates users on how to keep their personal data private

Researchers set up an option because it would set your life back in 1920s

Tricks like use cash not E-Pass or decline to disclose on 'Find My Friends'

TrackMeNot and Ad-Blocker are tools to block ads and data collectors

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The majority of people believe that being online makes it impossible to avoid data snatchers.

However, researchers say that there are ways to cover your digital tracks in both the online and offline world.

A new toolkit of privacy protecting techniques aims to teach users how to be invisible online.

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Self-proclaimed 'obfuscation' researchers have created a toolkit to help people hide their personal information online and how there is a great need for better regulations. The author has a toolkit of privacy protecting techniques that teach users how to be invisible online

A new book, 'Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest' aims to help users push back, software developers keep their work safe and encourage lawmakers not misuse data.

Authors Finn Brinton and Helen Nissenbaum, both professors at New York University, are often asked in interviews about simple steps the average person can take to protect their privacy online.

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The answer: It depends on what scares you the most, reported **NYU Stories**.

The user's guide explains data threats load a single pixel onto a website without you knowing, collects all sorts of information about the browser, the device you are using and most importantly, you.

TRICKS TO BE INVISIBLE ONLINE

Use cash instead of E-Passes, because it announces your location to readers that could be watching anywhere not just in toll booths.

Decline to share your location in iOS's 'Find My Friends' app.

TrackMeNot creates false queries to stop search engines from creating a profile on you.

For example, when you search 'leather boots,' it will also send along 'gluten', 'Spanish American War' and 'pantaloons' tape.

These extra words won't affect your search results, but it will confuse the browsers.

Another tool, ADNAUSEUM, registers a click on all the ads in your ad blocker and stops any attempt to build a profile filled with your likes and preferences based on the ads you click.

The authors stress that obfuscation should be used in conjunction with other protections, but it will educate the public about the issue and the need for stronger regulations.

Better regulations, in that organizations cannot use our own data against us.

Finn Brinton | Helen Nissenbaum

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Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest' (pictured) aims to help users push back, software developers keep their work safe and encourage lawmakers do not misuse data. Author Finn Brinton and Helen Nissenbaum, both professors at New York University, offer simple steps the average person can take to protect their privacy online

WHAT WOULD LIFE BE LIKE IF YOU DISCONNECTED COMPLETELY?

That makes for a big challenge, since there are so many threats and a notion of 'opting out' of all types of surveillance has become impossible as to be nearly nonsensical.

In the book, they mention Nissenbaum quip that it would mean leading 'the life of an undocumented migrant laborer of the 1920s, with no internet, no phones, no insurance, no assets, riding the bus and being paid off the books for illegal manual work.'

Better regulations, in that organizations cannot use our own data against us.

ADNAUSEUM: registers a click on all the ads in your ad blocker and stops any attempt to build a profile filled with your preferences based on the ads you click

Working in coordination with your ad blocker, AdNauseum quietly clicks every blocked ad, registering a vote on the ad network's databases. As the data gathered becomes increasingly nonsensical, user profiling and ad targeting, the ultimate goal, become fuzzier.

AdNauseum is a browser extension designed to obfuscate browsing data and protect users from surveillance and tracking by advertising networks. Simultaneously, AdNauseum works as a means of amplifying users' discontent with advertising networks that disregard privacy and facilitate bulk surveillance

AdNauseum joins a broader class of software systems that attempt to serve ethical, political, and expressive ends. In light of the industry's failure to achieve consent on a Do Not Track standard, or to otherwise address the excesses of network surveillance, AdNauseum allows individual users to take matters into their own hands, fighting back against unilateral surveillance.

Source: AdNauseum

App confuses trackers by clicking every ad so you don't have to

For example, the entities who rely on the data economy to make money, and they make a lot of money, to the police using software to check our threat 'scores'.

'Machines don't forget,' Brunton says.

'Suppose you have an agreement with one company. The best company run by the best people, but then they go bankrupt, or get subpoenaed, or acquired.'

'Your data ends up on the schedule of assets, and then you don't know where it might end up.'

TRACKMENOT: PROTECT YOUR WEB SEARCHES

TrackMeNot, a tool designed by Nissenbaum and colleagues, compiles fake queries to stop search engines from creating a profile on you.

TrackMeNot is a lightweight browser extension that helps protect web searchers from surveillance and data profiling by search engines. It does so not by means of obfuscation but by means of plausible deniability. It does so by generating a stream of fake queries (e.g. covering cover tracks), but instead, paradoxically, by the opposite strategy: noise and obfuscation.

With TrackMeNot, actual web searches, lost in a cloud of false leads, are essentially hidden in plain view. User-installed TrackMeNot works with Firefox and Chrome browsers and popular search engines (AOL, Yahoo!, Google, and Bing) and requires no 3rd-party servers or services.

It hides users' actual search trails in a cloud of 'ghost' queries, significantly increasing the difficulty of aggregating such data into accurate or revealing user profiles.

This serves as a means of amplifying users' discontent with advertising networks that not only disregard privacy, but also facilitate the bulk surveillance agendas of corporate and government agencies, as documented recently in disclosures by Edward Snowden and others.

Source: TrackMeNot

The authors made it very clear that they aren't against online advertising, but they believe the dry methods used by these firms are what stops over-touchers.

Nissenbaum explains that before these firms began running surveillance in the background, there was something called traditional advertising.

Nike could buy an ad space on, say, the New York Times [website], or contextual advertising, where Nike would buy space on Sports Illustrated.' Nissenbaum explained.

There were plenty of ways of advertising that didn't involve tracking people.

Brunton and Nissenbaum are working towards a better future for the public, but the team looks to the past for examples of obfuscation tactics throughout history.

HOW CAN DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE EFFECT YOU?

The authors stress that obfuscation won't make you completely invisible to unauthorized surveillance, but it will educate the public about the issue and the need for stronger regulations.

Better regulations, in that organizations cannot use our own data against us.

For example, the information is used in the future to increase a plane ticket the next time you book a vacation, suggest prices goods the next time you order online or hinder your chances of getting a loan because something about your data suggests you are a credit risk.

Not only haven't we agreed to letting others collect our personal information, but the 'modifications of power' building are so complex, and their consequences are so far-reaching, that it is almost impossible for us to understand exactly what we are being asked to agree to.

When the NSA knows around us, its name is plastered on every news site, but other quiet surveillance agencies are able to fly under the radar.

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Source: AdNauseum

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