# You Can't Hide from New App Buried in Your Web Browser

Individual liberty and privacy are not "in vogue" these days. The state and surveillance capitalists take an increasing interest in our lives, with little resistance from us. In fact, most of us purchase the very tools of our own surveillance: the consumer electronics that sleeplessly gather our data. Where will this lead?

In **yesterday's *Capital %26 Conflict***, I mentioned the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium – the international standards organisation for the internet), who are now actively developing a "currency agnostic" payment application that would run out of your internet browser.

I believe such an app would serve as a data mining tool for tech giants like Google, who will use your transaction history to find out even more about you, and then sell this information to marketers, and hand it over to intelligence agencies. Although the app would broaden the acceptance of cryptocurrencies, it would ultimately destroy their privacy value.

There is a parallel here in the evolution of the "the internet of money" – cryptocurrency – and the internet. In its early years, the internet was a haven for radical libertarians who saw cyberspace as means of escaping and subverting authoritarian control.

The independence of cyberspace

It was in this environment that the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) was born, which in the name of liberty made controversial statements like declaring the independence of cyberspace and taking part in a lawsuit against the Secret Service for seizing computers and floppy disks from a game developer. More recently, they made the news after flying a blimp bearing the slogan "illegal spying below" over the NSA data in Utah.

However, as the internet became more popular (particularly after September 1993, when AOL ran an aggressive marketing campaign, sending out millions of free internet trials in the post) libertarian values of its early adopters were slowly diluted by a user base that increasingly didn't care for them.

It was at this point that the W3C came along, to create international standards for the web.

Shortly after writing yesterday's article, the news broke that the EFF had resigned from the W3C. The reason they are resigning is because they believe the W3C is building a future where the websites you visit will ultimately have control over your computer, and not you.

The W3C is working on building "Encrypted Media Extensions" (EMEs – apologies for all these acronyms) into new versions of , the programming language used to build websites. This is in league with content creators like Netflix, who are trying to prevent piracy of their video content.

Control over you

However, in practice these extensions would hand over control of your internet browser to third parties, who would try to prevent you from doing anything they didn't want you to. These measures could be increasingly restrictive; the EFF warned in 2013 where these EMEs might lead:

> 'A Web where you cannot cut and paste text; where your browser can't "Save As…" an image; where the "allowed" uses of saved files are monitored beyond the browser; where Java is sealed away in opaque tombs; and maybe even where we can no longer effectively "View Source" on some sites…'

It probably wouldn't be all that hard to bypass these digital fences. However, anyone that did could have criminal and civil legal proceedings levelled against them – even if they were adding subtitles to video content or making it more accessible for the blind or deaf.

The push for EME was not only opposed by the EFF – numerous other members opposed it, including the Royal National Institute for Blind People, and the Ethereum Foundation, who published an extensive list of their issues with the project. However, the W3C leadership has ploughed on regardless – why? The EFF are cynical:

*"Somewhere along the way, the business values of those outside the web got important enough, and the values of technologists who built it got disposable enough, that even the wise elders who make our standards voted for something they know to be a fool's errand. We believe they will regret that choice."*

Do you treasure your digital liberty and privacy? If so, how do you go about safeguarding it? Or is it something you feel is impossible in this age surveillance? Let me know: **boaz@southbankresearch.com**

Until next time,


Boaz Shoshan
*Capital %26 Conflict*

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