

Cookie monsters lurking on web

O&E ONLINE

Maybe the time has come to discuss the Cookie Monster. One of my regular readers recently sent an E-mail request for more information on "cookies."

The use of cookies deserves a close look because of the privacy concerns shared by many Internet users.

"Cookies" is a tool that resides within Netscape and other browsers. Cookies act like an ongoing log of Web sites you visit. It lays dormant on your hard-drive until you load up your browser and begin visiting Web sites. Then this application begins to record on its log the names of the sites you visit.

The cookie initially is placed on your hard drive by a Web site which wants to conduct surveillance of your surfing habits. That cookie lays sleeping on your hard drive until you revisit that site when the site then captures information about. That information likely will include your site user name, when you last visited, which pages you visited, what products you ordered or what files you downloaded.

Some Web sites, for marketing reasons, are interested in the interests of people who visit their site. And so these sites, when you arrive, connect to your Cookies application and copies the log information. The log of Web sites you visit provides a profile of your interests which is of value to marketing-type people.

Although the business purpose may be legitimate, on-line users are concerned about privacy. Does business, or anyone else, have a right to gather information without the consumers consent?

Among those concerned is Justin Kerr, a journalist in Indiana who also has been engaged in electronic journalism in recent years. Kerr recently set his Web browser to prompt him every time a Web site tapped cookies on his hard drive. Kerr was amazed by the number of sites using this application.

Although I don't mind if a site uses a cookie to aid in my navigation of the site, I don't know if I feel the same way about giving up more specific access information.

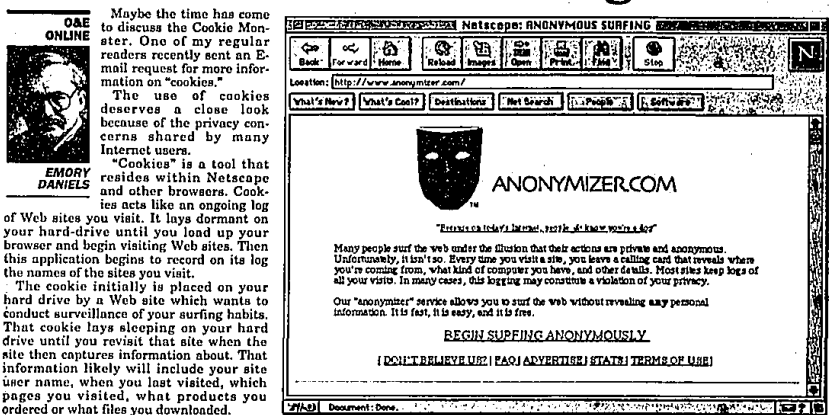
Marc Matteo, a Web engineer for the Sacramento Bee (<http://www.sacbee.com>), is less concerned about cookies.

"Despite all the myths about cookies, if you are using an even marginally up to date Web browser (basically anything NOT Netscape 2.0) the only way someone is going to get "more specific access information" about you is if you tell it to them in the first place.

"Cookies are merely tiny storage places in your browser that can be filled by web sites," Matteo continues, "Thinking that cookies are some evil incarnate is like thinking your shoe box is going to steal your shoes when you're not looking."

Vin Crobbie, president of Digital Deliverance in Brookline, MA, agrees with Matteo that cookies can't specifically identify an individual by name, age, or even gender

EMORY DANIELS



Protecting privacy: In addition to programs like DoubleClick, you can protect your privacy by surfing the web through sites like the Anonymizer at <http://www.anonymizer.com>.

but stresses that cookies very much are being used to monitor and gather information about users.

He points to DoubleClick, an application that implants cookies into the hard drives of any user who browses any Web site that licenses DoubleClick software.

Whenever that user subsequently accesses that or another DoubleClick licensee's Web site, the updated cookie is surreptitiously read from the user's hard drive and automatically reported back to DoubleClick.

DoubleClick uses this information (currently gathered from more than 70 major Web sites that license its software) to compile a "profile" of that user. DoubleClick then reports the user's profile back to the Web site licensee so the licensee can target specific ads to that user.

"DoubleClick may not know your exact identity, but it tracks your travels among major Web sites and may very well be able to identify your tastes," adds Crosby.

There are other similar tracking systems in use or development. Firefly's Passport system will do something similar but with potentially even more sophisticated profiling.

Because some Web sites ask users to register by name or E-mail address, it is theoretically possible to match registered identities with cookies, thereby identifying which individual has the tastes that vendors such as DoubleClick and Passport identify.

"Cookies today don't operate with the informed consent of consumers. Consumers may be voluntarily visiting Web sites, but many consumers wish to keep their identities, even their tastes, private."

The latest versions of Netscape and Microsoft Explorer do give users the ability to accept or decline cookies totally. (With Netscape Navigator 3.x, go to Options and look under Protocol; with Explorer, go to Options and then Advanced.)

An interesting view is offered by Bill Denomoro, president of Clickshare Corp. Denomoro describes his major product, Clickshare (<http://www.clickshare.com>), as a "reverse cookie."

"Instead of sites dropping bits of unrequested information on a user's hard drive, Clickshare vests a user with a digital calling card" which includes that user's anonymous ID. It is the user, when making an "http" request for information, who leaves this calling card at a Web site.

There is a new program called PGPCookie, a utility that lets you control which cookies are on your system. Go to <http://www.pgpc.com> if interested. There also are utilities at <http://www.wizvax.net/kevinmca> or <http://www.privnot.com> for Netscape and Explorer that will automatically delete cookies from your hard drive after each site visit.

Personally, I'm not overly concerned about cookies. The marketing data-grabbers already know a great deal about me and they are welcome to a log of my Internet journeys as well.

I am concerned about privacy but years ago I pulled my fortress walls closer together to protect what is really important.

(Emory Daniels may be reached via E-mail at emoryd@online.com. Past columns are available at <http://observer.emoryd.com/main/emoryd/archives.html>.)

MORE BUSINESS MILESTONES

From MILESTONES, E1
Unique Concepts International, a division of the agency, Davis is responsible for supervising the day-to-day activities for several MARS clients.



Asher



Gaskey

Robin Asher of Orchard Lake, David Gaskey of Royal Oak and Timothy Kraepel of Auburn Hills became shareholders of

Howard & Howard Attorneys, P.C. in Bloomfield Hills. Asher and Gaskey specialize in patent, copyright and trademark law. Kraepel concentrates his practice in business, mergers and acquisitions and banking.



Akkashian



Chambers

Brian Akkashian of Bloomfield Hills and Amy O'Meara Chambers of Southfield joined Howard & Howard. Akkashian specializes in business law and

Chambers concentrates her practice in commercial litigation.

Ross Roy Communications, Inc. in Bloomfield Hills promoted two officers to vice presidents. **Stella Kappos** of West Bloomfield was promoted to vice president/creative director, C.P.-J.B. Brands, and will oversee the creative development for car catalogs and all merchandising programs for Chrysler/Plymouth and Jeep/Eagle brands. **Bill Mason** of West Bloomfield was promoted to vice president/group supervisor-technology, and will continue to help manage the firm's interactive communications activities.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan senior vice president **George Francis III** of Southfield was named to the Olivet College Board of Trustees. Francis brings extensive leadership experience and board memberships with community and professional organizations in the Detroit area.

Stephan Morse, D.O., FAOCR, of Franklin was named chairman of **Botsford General Hospital's Radiology Department** in Farmington Hills. Morse is chief of Botsford's Nuclear Medicine Division and director of the hospital's radiology residency training program.

Marshall G. Solomon, D.P.M., of Farmington Hills was named chairman of **Botsford General Hospital's Podiatry Department**. Solomon is also director of podiatric education and resident training at Botsford, located in Farmington Hills.

Kmart from page E1

exert every effort to improve its assortments, store appearance, and customer service."

In the fourth quarter of 1996 the company recognized a \$108 million pretax gain on the sale of its holdings of Rio. Aid common stock. Kmart also recorded a charge of \$98.8 million related to the valuation of its international operations. Current-year net income reflected an effective tax rate of 26 percent due to favorable tax treatments on these international operations. In addition, the company expects its 1997 tax provision to reflect more typical tax rates.

Including the impact of discontinued operations, the company reported a net loss for the fourth quarter of \$164 million, or \$.27

per share compared to a net loss of \$420 million, or \$.91 per share, for the fourth quarter of 1995. As previously announced, Kmart reclassified its Builders Square subsidiary, a discontinued operation in the fourth quarter and recorded a non-cash charge of \$385 million, net of tax, or \$.69 per share, for the estimated loss on its disposition of Builders Square.

Total sales for 1996 were \$31.437 billion, a decrease of 0.9 percent from \$31.713 billion in the preceding year. Full year 1996 includes sales for 52 weeks whereas 1995 included 53 weeks. On a comparable store basis, consolidated sales were up 2.5 percent and U.S. Kmart sales were up 2.6 percent.

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