

Protecting your Privacy with Advertisers on Android Phones

July 8, 2016 - Last week we told you about Google's My Activity page and the fact that it allows you to see just how detailed Google's tracking has become. With Google's default settings, virtually everywhere you go - online and offline - is tracked by the company. Fortunately, Google provides you with settings that allow you to control how much information you share with the company; allowing you to turn off most or all of their tracking. But Google isn't the only company tracking you. Online advertising companies are also tracking your viewing habits. And that got us thinking about how you can take control of what they see.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
```

Online advertising can be extremely intrusive. In many cases, it is delivered in pop-up menus that take up memory and slow down your Android device. Those factors alone can be aggravating. But the worst thing about it is really the privacy violation that takes place when ads are delivered. Advertisers can find out which websites you visit, what you are shopping for and what topics interest you. With that information, they try to deliver ads that you are more likely to respond to. It's great if you are selling something but not so good if you value your privacy and think that your shopping habits are nobody's business but your own. This is where ad-blocking technology comes into play.

Many of the mobile internet browsers available to users of Android phones contain ad blocking capabilities. Unfortunately, most of those ad blockers don't work 100% of the time. In fact, for people who don't have some technical capability, we didn't find a single option that was completely reliable at blocking advertising. With that said, there are some things you can do to cut down on the amount of advertising you receive.

Unless you use Firefox for Android, the easiest solution we found was a program called AdBlock Browser, which can be downloaded from Google's Play Store. It doesn't catch all ads, but it stopped enough of them to make a real difference in performance. If you use Firefox for Android, you'd feel right at home with this browser. That's because it is simply a modification of Firefox with the AdBlock plug in enabled and all other plug-ins disabled. But Firefox users can actually just get the AdBlock plug-in and install it. If you don't know how to do that, just Google "Firefox Android AdBlock plugin" (without the quotation marks). Then click on the first link in the search results.

There is a way to stop virtually all advertising on Android phones but you will need to be more than a novice Android user and you'll also need to have a "rooted" phone. If you don't know what a rooted phone is, then you almost certainly don't have one. Rooting is a way for phone owners to gain access to all of the capabilities in their phone and bypass some of the restrictions that phone carriers place on phones. In the event you are interested in learning about rooting, you can find some basic information here. A word of caution though. If you are thinking about rooting your own phone, do plenty of research first. If done incorrectly, it can make the phone unusable - which is called "bricking" because your phone will

be about as useful as a brick. You also need to know that as soon as you root your device, you have voided your warranty.

If you do have a rooted device, there is a great program that stops just about all advertising. It is called AdAway and it is totally free. Obviously, Google would prefer that you not use ad blocking, and they are doing everything they can to see that you can't install AdAway. In fact, they have removed most ad blocking software from the Play Store. But you can get it through f-droid.org and other alternative Android markets. For complete instructions on installing AdAway, GuidingTech.com has published a step by step article that you can find [here](#).

After installation of AdAway, the speed with which pages load in my browser was increased significantly. And one website that I use a lot, but which litters their pages with ads causing my browser to constantly crash, now loads and runs without any hassle. Best of all, AdAway works regardless of which internet browser you prefer.

For me, just the fact that AdAway stopped all the intrusive pop-up ads I'd been getting made installing it worth the trouble. But in the long run, the real benefit is that I'm now an almost impossible target for online advertisers. They can't see what I'm viewing online and I'm just fine with that.

by Jim Malmberg

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