

Study Finds Many Websites Collecting User Information Even When Forms Are Never Submitted

May 27, 2022 - We've all done it. You visit a website, start to fill out registration data and then decide you're not going to join. You never click the "submit" button so you just assume that your information disappears. You just move on to the next site. What you don't know is that your information may have been harvested anyway.

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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);  
})();
```

```
(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);  
})();
```

A recently published study by two European universities found that out of 100,000 websites they studied, roughly 4.5% of them were collecting user data from unsubmitted forms. There were approximately 1,600 sites in Europe that were doing this, and around 2,900 American sites. These included some of the largest sites on the internet.

The study names the sites and includes companies like Facebook (now Meta), USA Today and WebMD.

In some cases, the collected data was going to third parties through web scripts. In 52 cases, the companies involved were unaware of the issue and made corrections to stop collection.

While it may be disturbing to think that websites you've decided not to do business with have collected your personal data, it really isn't that surprising. Consumer information has become a valuable commodity that is regularly sold. While some of the companies involved may face some legal issues as a result... especially those in violation of European privacy laws... its unlikely that the practice of collecting data from users who abandon forms will end anytime soon. Because of this, consumers may want to think twice prior to filling out web forms. Make sure that you want to do business with a company before you move forward with writing any of your information down. Otherwise, you're taking a risk that the site you're thinking about doing business with is honorable. And they may not be.

by Jim Malmberg

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