



A brief history and future of cookies

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<http://www.ck-wong.ca/technology/a%20brief%20history%20and%20future%20of%20cookies.pdf>

Introduction

I am sorry that this is not a piece for cooking. It is about human activity tracking. Internet world has been plagued by cookies; one of the medium used by spyware. I examine its heritage in this article.

Cookie

When you jump from one web page to another, the web server is designed not to remember you. Only in specific cases that continuity is needed, such as doing banking transaction, the web server remembers you through the account you sign on. A lot of information about you and your preference on the web page such as language are recorded in a *small* file on your computer called cookie that remember your preference. Every time you visit that specific web page, the corresponding cookie is read by the web page on your computer and displays the page accordingly. This happens on your computer.

Flavor of Cookies

From a resource perspective, it is preferred to store the cookie and keep it there. Otherwise huge storage is required. When your personal data is not passed back to the web server, your privacy is respected. It is one of the policies the web browser understood. You could set the browser to accept this type of cookies.

In other cases, it would be necessary to identify yourself without doing log on. For example, many hotel reservations system offers you the service to remember your username. When you visit their site, you could be identified automatically a display your reservation preferences. Before they create such cookie, you have to be asked to get the permission. From the legal perspective, it is a contract. You should be careful and do not just say yes without going through that boring 20 pages.

The third type of cookies is the malicious type that collects different facts from you. It could even include your keystrokes. This is the dangerous type that you should watch.

Cookie Indigestion

When use of cookie is limited to serve you, it is justified. In many cases the tracking becomes complex and excessive the user becomes a victim. Several consequences will impede the user. Because the cookie is a file, each time you do a little action, the cookie file could be opened and updated. Open and close file is a very time consuming operation. As a result, you could suffer computer performance. On top of this, the file

could grow to fairly large if the information accumulated over a period. Last but not all if the file is sent back to the cookie collector, you lost your Internet bandwidth.

It is really important to ensure you run anti-spyware frequently to clean up your computer. But the most important is not to install any software you do not fully understand their function. Some software come with spyware, when you remove the spyware portion, it does not only make the software failure but also damage you system and cripple it.

A cookie that we do not call cookie

Cookie is not a modern invention. Looking at your passport, it has the same function including collecting data. It also has the characteristic of identification.

Credit card is also another cookie that stores data and provides you the convenience to purchase from a stranger. The worse part is that all the confidential data are human readable and exposed during a transaction. When we scream to complain the danger of cookie, we did not have a second thought when we hand out our credit card to the waiter or waitress.

Another most common type of plastic cookie that behaves exactly like malicious cookie is called air mile card or point collection card. Your transaction data which identifies your spending pattern is your private information and is collected and compiled. This is usually disclosed in the contract you signed up.

The cookie has evolved to a state of passive virtual individual. The next step is to become an active virtual individual. Traveling agent has been researched for more than five years. It is a software entity that can hop from place to place to do things. The danger of it is that it can do purchase on your behalf. Before this happens, the legal ramification has to be done. One of the most important but has not catch much attention is how to handle traveling agent clones which could be done involuntarily. Perhaps it is also like human clone; band it and put on a blindfold.

Spyware Detection Software

The most popular are Ad-ware and Spybot. Both could be downloaded from <http://www.download.com/>. A word of caution on downloading software, please download from prestige site to ensure you do not get malicious software or modified software packages.

Periodically, it is also recommended to do a clean up your internet temporary files and cookies. Doing so it does not just recover the disk space you also delete those hidden spywares or software that lived in the file cache and cookie space. You may want to do it once every quarter if not more frequent.