



TRACKING BY ANY NAME IS STILL TRACKING

It's no secret that internet companies make billions of dollars selling ads. The more targeted the ads, the more they can charge.

Targeting means serving the ad to people in specific demographics or groups, basically people who are most apt to buy the product or service. How do they target, by gathering as much information about you as they can. The more data collected about you, the more targeted the ads.

Information about you is collected from as many sources as possible. Third party cookies were a key part of this system. By definition, cookies are a small amount of data put on your computer that the company placing the cookie can use for gathering information. The difference between first-party cookies and third-party cookies is who places the cookie. First-party cookies are inserted by a site you visit. Third-party cookies are inserted by any other site. Typically, sites that buy advertising from the first-party site and then can gather information about visitors to that site. The information gathered can be about how you view that site, and other sites you visit.

Lately, privacy has gotten more publicity. In response, browsers are adding capabilities to improve privacy including preventing the placement of third-party cookies. In some countries, privacy is more regulated, and users have more control over their data.

With the move to limit or prohibit third-party cookies there is a corresponding move by companies using them to find a replacement that can gather data about you.

Google has proposed a system called FLoC, Federated Learning of Cohorts. Certainly sounds impressive. It is part of a movement called cookieless ad targeting. The stated intent is to protect people's privacy by creating more anonymity. In theory, very admirable.

In practice it appears to be otherwise. Privacy and data ethics people say the FLoC id is being combined with other data on people that is traceable to a specific person. The result if data gathering companies are getting data on you faster than they would have using third-party cookies.

The privacy advocates are concerned because the FLoC ID can be a persistent form of identification, meaning it won't change. Combining it with information the companies already know gives a more detailed picture of you and your activity than was possible with third-party cookies. With a persistent identifier, data gathered over time can be combined to continually improve their picture of you.

It is doubtful that companies that profit from selling targeted advertising will provide more privacy protections without being forced to legally. And even then, they will look for ways around restrictions rather than give up a business model yielding countless billions of dollars.

Want to learn more about cyber security and education, contact AIM Cyber at info@AIMglb.com or call (888) 773-1920.