JAMES GLAVE SCIENCE DEC 10, 1996 8:00 PM

PGP Lets You Take Charge of Your Cookies

Cookies track your movements around the Web. But a new plug-in from PGP will give you the magic recipe to stop them.

SAVE

WEB SITE SALES reps, marketers, and researchers want to know who you are, what you like, and where you're going. Their tool is the magic cookie, a tiny tracking file they serve to your computer, often without your knowing it, to better target advertising.

PGP Inc. thinks that such cookies can be an invasion of privacy, and on Monday announced PGPcookie.cutter to deal with them.

PGPcookie.cutter is a graphical plug-in that lets users turn cookies off or on globally or view a window that shows all the cookies that have been set. A drag-and-drop function allows users to selectively filter the tracking files.

"Our product streams in real time," said Gene Hoffman, PGP director of business development. "There's a little cookie man and a number counter at the top right of the browser that shows you what kind of cookies are being set."

Currently, users concerned about privacy can ask their browser to show an alert before any cookies are sent. But if a cookie is refused on a Netscape browser,

Meta EX1037
IPR2024-00528
U.S. Patent No. 8,249,932

some sites will continually ask to send it, more than a dozen times.

PGPcookie.cutter will replace this user annoyance with a greater degree of control. But there are also serious privacy issues surrounding cookies.

"Third-party cookies can track you across different sites," said Hoffman, referring to ad targeting companies such as DoubleClick.

"This cleanly and anonymously clears that problem," Hoffman said. "You get informed consent on all the cookies that leave or come in on your machine."

DoubleClick uses a tracking cookie to stealthily follow your movements between Web sites, build a centralized profile of your likes and dislikes, then serve you a targeted ad banner, all without your knowledge.

But Dwight Merriman, DoubleClick's chief technical officer, isn't concerned that PGPcookie.cutter will undermine his business model.

"We feel that the number of users who take the time to download it will be a relatively small percentage," said Merriman. "We can deliver ads fine without the cookies. If [the number of people using the plug-in] is a small percentage it's actually good. We want those people to be happy and comfortable with our business model."

PGP will also introduce an update to the Internet Engineering Task Force cookie specification. The spec will allow those Web sites that feel their cookie must be fed to set a special cookie that the plug-in will recognize. That special cookie will deliver a short text file from the server justifying why the site feels the cookie is necessary.

PGPcookie.cutter will be available for US$29.95 from the PGP Web site in January.

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