

Mozilla quietly adds user tracking feature in new Firefox update

Mozilla is now the target of complaints after privacy advocates discovered a problem with one of the browser's new features.

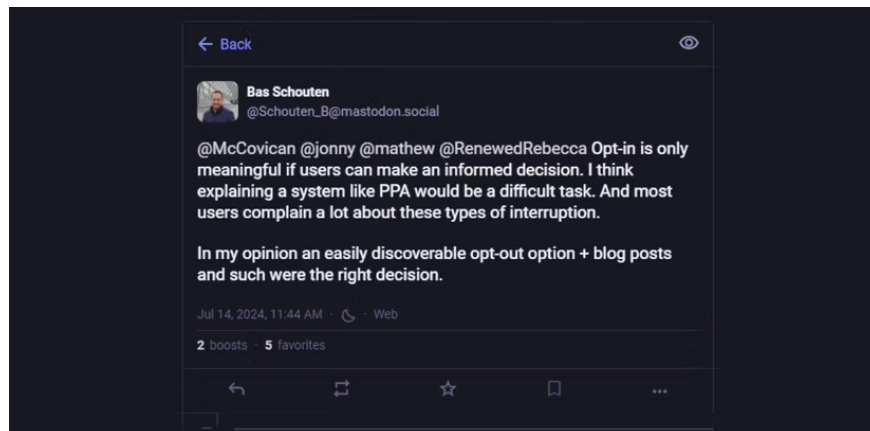
As online advertising becomes the lifeblood of some companies, some browser makers are looking for ways to track user data to deliver better ads. Sometimes these technologies are detailed and allow people to opt out, sometimes they aren't. Unfortunately, it seems Mozilla falls into the latter category, as it's now the target of complaints after privacy advocates discovered problems with one of the browser's new features.

Mozilla faces complaints about tracking users

As spotted by The Hacker News, the complaint was made by None Of Your Business (NOYB), a donation-funded group that advocates for user privacy. NOYB found a new feature in Firefox version 128 called 'Privacy Preserving Attribution,' which sounds great on paper. But it's not:

Despite its interesting name, this technology allows Firefox to track user behavior across websites. Essentially, the browser is now in control of the tracking, rather than individual websites. While this may be an improvement over the more intrusive cookie tracking, the company never asks users if they want to enable the feature. Instead, Mozilla decided to enable it by default after people installed a recent software update.

NOYB compares the new feature to Google's failed Privacy Sandbox tool. Instead of websites tracking users through cookies, websites will ask Firefox for information about users. NOYB claims that while this technology is better than "unlimited tracking," it means Firefox itself is now collecting data about its users, thus violating the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) laws.



Worst of all, it seems that enabling the PPA doesn't disable cookie-based tracking. If what NOYB believes is true, sites could be tracking users themselves while collecting Firefox data using the PPA, meaning it's not really "privacy-protecting" at all.

NOYB notes that Firefox 128 automatically enabled the Privacy Preserving Attribution feature without warning users. As for why it did so, NOYB points to a Mastodon post by Mozilla Performance Engineering Lead Bas Schouten, who states that *'explaining a system like PPA would be a difficult task'* and implies that the browser never mentioned the change because *'users complained a lot about these kinds of disruptions . '*

What to do if you're worried about Firefox tracking you?

It's unfortunate to see Mozilla resort to these tactics, as privacy-conscious people prefer this browser over some of its competitors. Fortunately, there are plenty of free incognito browsers you can switch to if you're not comfortable with Firefox's practices. And if you're not sure why this new feature is a problem, read up on some common privacy misconceptions to learn why you should be careful about your details online.

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