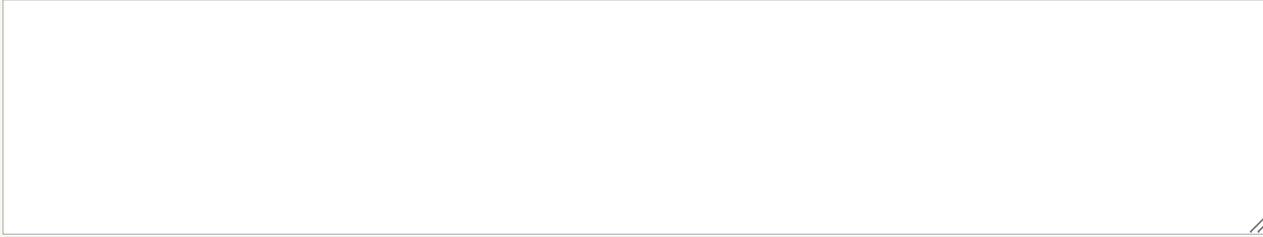▲ Each Firefox download has a unique identifier (ghacks.net)

316 points by gslin 6 hours ago | hide | past | favorite | 188 comments

[comment text area]

add comment

▲ car_analogy 4 hours ago | next [–]

Suppose you want to do something anonymously.

1. Download installer from Mozilla from your home network - Mozilla now has your home IP and installer ID.

2. Transfer it via USB key to a secure, anonymous computer - one not linked to you, on a network not associated with you, such as public WiFi.

3. Install Firefox using that installer on said computer. It transmits the installer ID to Mozilla, which matches the one given to your home IP, thereby deanonymizing you.

4. Mozilla receives a warrant for this information, or it is hacked, or the organization is infiltrated by a single government or corporate spy.

Edit: It gets worse. Suppose a newspaper IT department takes care of providing Firefox and other trusted software installers to their reporters. Now Mozilla can determine who that newspaper helped with IT, such as journalists or sources. Or if you provide trusted software to your friends, Mozilla gets part of your social graph.

reply

> ▲ thyrox 1 hour ago | parent | next [–]
>
> You know I let a lot of important things in Firefox slide (like the poor Webspeech API support, bad text-to-speech, some missing extensions and a lot of other things) but I still make it a habit to use it over Chrome (and recommend it to everybody) as somewhere in my mind it feels like a small revolt against the giant evil Google corp.
>
> But stuff like this and other shenanigans in the past (like Mr.robot, misuse of funding, etc) is really off-putting sometimes. It really makes me feel naive and just drinking the support open-source kool-aid.
>
> reply
>
> > ▲ OrlandoHakim 2 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]
> >
> > I switched to Brave - no regrets
> >
> > reply

> ▲ abandonliberty 52 minutes ago | parent | prev | next [–]
>
> I can't believe the apologists commenting on this.
>
> Firefox put a lot of effort into tracking download to install behavior. Maybe this is the only violation you know about. There's no reason to continue to believe in Mozilla's good faith. They've been captured, and are 90% dependent on Google revenue.
>
> Discussion here: https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=28954390
>
> Firefox is dead. It's time to move past denial. It doesn't stand for anything you think it does. I'm sad, too. Time to bury the putrid, rotting corpse.
>
> reply
>
> > ▲ rackjack 25 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]
> >
> > What're the alternatives to Firefox? The only ones that come to mind are Opera and Brave, and Brave had some controversy too.
> >
> > reply
> >
> > > ▲ OrlandoHakim 1 minute ago | root | parent | next [–]
> > >
> > > What is controversial about Brave? Seems like the best alternative at the moment IMHO
> > >
> > > reply

> ▲ kaba0 3 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]
>
> I hope you don't use the internet at all if this is your threat model.
>
> reply
>
> > ▲ car_analogy 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

The threat model is reasonable behavior + a single warrant or data leak. It may not be the most likely way of compromise, but it's very possible, and such small insecurities add up. Mozilla should be making such compromise *less* likely, not *more*.

reply

▲ Mathnerd314 1 hour ago | parent | prev | next [–]

The mistake is at step 1 when you downloaded Firefox instead of Tor Browser.

reply

  ▲ rodamaral 56 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Some people use Tor within Firefox via a SOCKS proxy. This might defeat the protection given by Tor.

reply

    ▲ Mathnerd314 31 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Right which is why the Tor FAQ says using a browser besides Tor Browser is dangerous and not recommended: https://support.torproject.org/tbb/tbb-9/

It's like how when you're baking a cake, the easiest way to do it is to buy a cake mix and follow the directions on the back. Yes, maybe you can make a tastier cake by changing the directions or using better ingredients, but you also introduced the possibility of the cake exploding. Particularly with anonymity, the trick is to do what everyone else who wants to be anonymous is doing.

reply

▲ Nbox9 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

What's your point, that someone can attempt to do something anonymously and fail?

reply

  ▲ car_analogy 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

My point is that they failed only because they were betrayed by the free software tool they thought they could trust.

reply

    ▲ charcircuit 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Mozilla has never advertised that their software was designed to keep you anonymous.

reply

      ▲ kreeben 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

No, but they advertise that "Firefox automatically protects your privacy while you browse".

https://support.mozilla.org/en-US/kb/enhanced-tracking-prote...

reply

        ▲ shreddit 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

technically they did not lie. "While you browse" is clearly excluding the time whilst installing the browser.

reply

          ▲ ll2ll 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

They promote their product by claiming that it protects people's privacy. They do something that can be reasonably interpreted as tracking (which it is, whether it is download/installation tracking as they claim, or user tracking as some people claim).

For the most part, privacy is based upon trust. Trust is earned. You don't earn trust by doing things behind people's backs or claiming that they are technically telling the truth.

reply

          ▲ GekkePrutser 1 hour ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Taken straight out of the "terms and conditions apply" fine print playbook :)

reply

        ▲ charcircuit 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

It's possible that they are tracking how many times an installer gets used without violating your privacy. Installers can be shared online or you can install it on someone else's computer. It's not like they are specific to a person.

reply

          ▲ GekkePrutser 1 hour ago | root | parent | next [–]

True but why? There just be a really heavy reason to introduce something like this. I don't see it.

reply

        ▲ ekianjo 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

They never advertised either they were tracking every download...

reply

chris_wot 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

They have whole campaigns against Facebook railing against intrusions into privacy.

reply

encryptluks2 4 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

No the point is that Mozilla is dishonest about their causes and consistently take actions that are hostile to user's privacy.

reply

smitty1e 2 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

> Suppose you want to do something anonymously.

> 1. Download installer from Mozilla from your home network - Mozilla now has your home IP and installer ID.

Compile from source?

reply

car_analogy 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Of course the "attack" is easy to avoid. But you first have to know about it. Mozilla should not be planting such landmines.

reply

ashwagary 11 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Now let's think about how much users can trust Firefox's VPN service. Multipurpose telemetry being utilized there too?

reply

woodruffw 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

This isn't a landmine in any normal threat model. The average person is concerned with identity theft and *perhaps* their local law enforcement, not the full weight of domestic or foreign intelligence services.

reply

car_analogy 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

It may not concern the "average person", but it contributes to the omnipresent surveillance endangering the extraordinary people we rely on to keep an eye on our governments and corporations.

If we only care about the average person, we may as well have Firefox snitch to the NSA and their Russian, Chinese, Indian, etc. equivalents, plus Microsoft, Google, Raytheon, General Electric,..

reply

ipaddr 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

The average person fears the domestic intelligence service and is not as concerned with local police.

reply

ashwagary 9 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

The thousands of people a year murdered by local police (many of whom are unarmed and innocent) would probably disagree.

reply

systemvoltage 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

I can't remember exactly but Apple also does this with apps. "Downloaded from ...".

reply

evilduck 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

That's a slight bit different because that file metadata is being assigned on the receiving client side and not from the distributor of the file. Likewise, that info is stored in your Spotlight index, not the file itself and isn't moved with the file (you can look at the raw metadata with the `mdls` command on a Mac and see that it is lost when you move something to a USB stick, or upload it to your own server or something)

reply

GekkePrutser 52 minutes ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

That is also annoying but two wrongs don't make a right.

Also Apple seems to just track this to show a prompt as to why they need approval for the install. And it's just stored locally in the metadata.

But yes I wish this prompt could be completely turned off. This isn't just security for the user though, they have a clear financial motive in promoting their app store as an easier option. After all the app store is a huge revenue driver for them on mobile but not on Mac.

Also Apple has done a lot worse things like checking the notarisation online every time an app was launched. They have now cut this back to once every few days since the outcry about it but still it's something you should be able to turn off IMO.

But what do you expect from a closed source OS (yes it is, only the kernel is open). And again, the fact that Apple does it too does not make Mozilla's action less questionable.

reply

dylan604 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Isn't that just storing the domain name from which served the file? I actually find this useful for those times when I can't remember where a file came from but need to use the site again. Having that data in a Get Info windo has been useful and faster than web searching.

reply

weikju 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Except this is an attribute saved on the file locally on your system, added by your browser when you download it, not something that Apple stores on their servers and tracks.

reply

zagrebian 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

> Mozilla now has your home IP

Since when does Mozilla collect IP addresses?

reply

car_analogy 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Any connection to Mozilla's servers reveals your IP to them. Given the amount of telemetry in Firefox, it's foolish to assume they don't log these IPs. And in either case, they could be legally compelled to. But afaik, under US law, they cannot be compelled to subvert their software, e.g. to add such spyware features if they were not already present.

reply

zagrebian 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Why would Mozilla need the IP address? It doesn't seem useful for their telemetry.

reply

d110af5ccf 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Even if they don't (currently) feel that they need them, they could be compelled by law enforcement to retain logs and forbidden from revealing this fact publicly. Or their network could get infiltrated.

reply

ygjb 15 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

How do you propose to prevent a user from leaking their home IP address to Mozilla without undermining the ability to: * Download the browser * implement a safe browsing mechanism * support automatic updates (which are a critical security feature)

reply

car_analogy 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

What part of Mozilla's behavior makes you assume they *don't*? It's easy to come up with some dubious internal justification to store IPs (like to determine where to focus internationalization efforts).

reply

mynameisvlad 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

It's not even internal justification, it's just plainly the default for practically any web server that does logging. You would have to go out of your way to disable it.

reply

detaro 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Not logging IPs or establishing controls on it is table-stakes for anyone doing anything serious about privacy.

reply

perryizgr8 1 hour ago | root | parent | next [–]

Yeah, kind of like not embedding each download with a unique ID. Oops...

reply

idiotsecant 4 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

They had to serve you the file, for which they needed your IP. If they're willing to assign each downloaded client a unique ID what are the odds they are *not* storing the IP address associated with that unique ID?

reply

zagrebian 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Why would Mozilla need the IP address?

reply

bobkazamakis 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

...to respond to requests to their server? you can't establish a tcp connection without both ends.

reply

car_analogy 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Why would they need installer IDs? The question is if they collect it, not if they need it, and all their other behavior suggests that they do collect it.

reply

GekkePrutser 1 hour ago | root | parent | next [–]

Also, if they don't collect it, what's the point in even having it?

reply

zagrebian 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

The article explains why: to figure out why there are more installs than downloads.

reply

Zircom 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

They can probably reach the same conclusions about why there might be more installs than downloads by thinking about it for maybe 5 seconds instead of tracking people.

Easiest explanation off the top of my head, without reading the article, would be IT departments including Firefox in their base image they use on all their standard issue computers, resulting in hundreds and possibly thousands of different installs having the same download ID. That alone by itself would cause an absolutely massive discrepancy between download and install numbers. My company includes Firefox in our base image and it's on at least 200,000 different laptops and desktops, with a handful of different download IDs between them depending on when they got issued the computer.

reply

jcynix 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Not just companies. I somtimes do this at home to save bandwidth / download time and then install software from usb stick.

reply

kreeben 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Playing your game, why would Mozilla need to know this?

reply

GekkePrutser 1 hour ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

The reasons are easily seen though. Corporate IT departments autodeploying, Linux packaging repos, people compiling from source.

Also, they could just *ask*, instead of adding more spyware. Like a survey.

reply

bbarnett 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

I wonder of they are confused by apt-get install firefox.

(Joking, but only a little.)

reply

ipaddr 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

To figure out locale of users.

reply

abandonliberty 47 minutes ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Are you suggesting in good faith that Mozilla would implement and transmit a unique ID without linking you to your download session? I've never come so close to breaking hacker news etiquette.

reply

KennyBlanken 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

You seem to be unaware that intelligence services have been hoovering up internet traffic wholesale for decades, and that telcos do it internally as well. Verizon's "supercookie" is a great example.

reply

zagrebian 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

But Mozilla is not a government agency or a telco.

reply

foerbert 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Are government agencies somehow restricted to compromise telcos but not any other organization?

reply

ordu 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

They seem to be trying to gather a lot of telemetry to measure how they can boost popularity of Firefox. I wonder did they tried to measure how the measurement itself influences popularity? Social measurements are like quantum ones, they

change reality.

There was a funny story of a Hawthorn Experiment[1], which tried to find ways to boost productivity but at the end managed to state just that the very attempt to conduct an experiment boosts productivity. It seems to me that with Mozilla the effect has a opposite sign and any attempt to measure decreases the target variables of decision making. And therefore they need to find ways to measure "non-invasively", not to measure every little thing they can measure.

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawthorne_effect

reply

▲ rurp 4 hours ago | parent | next [–]

> They seem to be trying to gather a lot of telemetry to measure how they can boost popularity of Firefox.

This might sound like a crazy idea, but they could always try listening to users! Everytime I get annoyed by something in Firefox and try to find a fix for it, I find a *lot* of people with the same issue across HN, Reddit, the Mozilla forums, etc. There is rarely any sign that a decision maker from Mozilla cares one bit. But rather than listening to the many vocal complaints, suggestions, and other copious public feedback... they add a unique download identifier. Ok then.

I really, really hope that Mozilla gets new management before it's too late (if it's not already).

reply

▲ kyleee 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

yeah the pay of the higher ups does not seem to be tied to success of the browser or the relationship they have with their users; endlessly depressing TBH

reply

▲ causality0 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

Well they've spent a decade trying the "be more like Chrome" method. I suggest they try the "be more like Firefox from when Firefox was successful" method.

reply

▲ GekkePrutser 48 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Yep. Trying to aim at the mainstream they've already lost, and alienating the privacy conscious power user (their last userbase) ever more...

If only they would come to their senses..

reply

▲ LordDragonfang 4 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Firefox was successful when it was the alternative, better, option to the dominant Internet Explorer. Now the dominant browser is Chrom(e|ium). The two scenarios are *very* different.

reply

▲ causality0 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Precisely. Firefox is never going to defeat Chrome in the "being Chrome" category. If it wants to exist as more than a tool for Google to avoid antitrust lawsuits, it can't keep playing that game. It has to differentiate. Privacy is not differentiation because it's invisible and HN commentators are 90% of the people who care about it. I want the sense of power back. I want the feeling that Firefox gave me a decade ago that my browser behaved *exactly* the way I wanted it to and *nothing* about it ticked me off because if I didn't like it I could just change it.

Nowadays using Firefox feels more like holding a political demonstration in an empty room than using the finely-tuned instrument I once had.

reply

▲ function_seven 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

> *Nowadays using Firefox feels more like holding a political demonstration in an empty room than using the finely-tuned instrument I once had.*

I can't think of better words to describe my feeling as a Firefox holdout. It's still my default browser, and the one I use for 97% of my work. Mozilla is breaking my heart with their floundering. Like a fantasy author who keeps getting mired in side quests and can never get back to the main plot.

Stop with the goofy marketing tie ins, the hostile telemetry choices, the side products like Pocket and VPN, and just make a fucking browser that doesn't attempt to hide complexity from the user. Focus on that, do yearly fundraising like Wikipedia does, and be content.

reply

▲ GekkePrutser 43 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Indeed.. For me the only reason I still really use it is because the other options are even worse. I definitely won't use Chrome. And Microsoft is pushing edge so hard it annoys me (both at work politically, and by pushing it everywhere in Windows)

Also, Firefox is the only browser I know that has end to end encrypted sync. Google and Microsoft enjoy snooping around in your bookmarks (great to determine marketing interests) too much to ever offer this. You can even self host it.

Also it still has a few power user features left over like container tabs. Though they've relegated it to a plug-in now.

reply

▲ darkfirefly 54 minutes ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Maybe uh... not like Wikipedia does https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:CANCER

reply

△ function_seven 41 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Hah, yeah, I've seen that page before. It's not ideal. I'd still take it over their current funding strategy of "don't piss off Google."

Or maybe I should find a better example. But one thing about Wikipedia is that it appears to be much the same as it was 10 years ago and more. Wikipedia hasn't started introducing Wiki VPN, nor has it partnered with Mr. Robot to temporarily insert marketing stuff into articles.

To the extent that Wikimedia has graft and vanity projects, they're not ruining the core "product".

So... I guess *yeah, just like Wikipedia*, as in "Look, even with donations you can spend a crapton of money. Maybe not $500mm a year, but still enough to support development of an open source software product."

reply

△ TylerE 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

With a strategy like that how would they justify millions a year in C-level salaries?

reply

△ matheusmoreira 23 minutes ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

I too want my power back. I want my *user agent* back. I especially want total inalienable power over the websites I'm browsing. The kind of power I'd have if I were to write a custom client for each website: the power to freely script, copy, save, edit, block and delete, whether the site's owner wants it or not.

reply

△ estaseuropano 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

That seems like a very harsh interpretation. Very few people will care whether their specific download is tracked. I do honestly wonder how that adds vakuento Mozilla, but no one will *not* use Firefox due to this- especially as every single alternative is much worse than Firefox on such metrics.

reply

△ 8bitsrule 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

If they really thought that 'very few people' would care about it ... why then didn't they 'the privacy browser' reveal this 'feature' when it was rolled out?

'Low-level skulduggery' is the nicest description I can muster (noone wants to hear what I really think).... Now (with telemetry 'turned off' each time before took it online) I have to wonder what else is 'protecting' me....

reply

△ threatripper 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

Maybe they just kind of forgot how to make good software and now desperately try to recreate that magic using loads of metrics and social experiments leading to loads of competing interpretations and infighting.

reply

△ ordu 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

There are nothing wrong with laying a scientific basis under your anecdotal experience, to get an ability to reproduce your successes. But it must be done by using the best possible scientific methods and by great minds, just a statistics wouldn't do it magically.

My (probably wrong) opinion, is that they hired data scientists who knows nothing about social science's research and these statisticians are trying to substitute research with data gathering and statistics. If something doesn't work, then instead of refining their research techniques they gather more data. They had hit the ceiling of this paradigm but they do not know it.

There are other options beyond data. For example you can find representatives of different categories of users and research their use of your software (or software you compete with). You need not have millions of representatives, a dozen would be enough for the most practical purposes, just pick them carefully so they will be the most diverse set of representatives. Or you can even have no real representatives, you can imagine them. It is a real technique of UX professionals, I heard of it in a talk at some conference from people who are professionally using it. If it doesn't seem rigorous enough, one could dig into Judea Pearl and to make a formal quantitative model out of it. One can even measure differences between this quantitative model and the reality, and it wouldn't necessarily lead to an annoying telemetry.

I will not be surprised if there are techniques I never heard of that can compete with a statistical data processing: I'm not an UX specialist, I just was curious about it at some point, because it lays on a boundaries of two interests of mine -- psychology research and software development. But Mozilla seem unaware of them all. They gather data instead.

reply

△ GekkePrutser 40 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

The benefit of having a sea of data is that it's easier to cherry pick the data points that support exactly what you want to say :)

reply

▲ delusional 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

I think the physical analogy you're thinking about is "the observer effect"[1]. And it's actually a pretty much universal problem in physics, not just quantum mechanics.

[1]: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observer_effect_(physics)

reply

▲ moonshinefe 4 hours ago | prev | next [–]

"Principle 4: Individuals' security and privacy on the internet are fundamental and must not be treated as optional."[1]

https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/about/manifesto/

reply

    ▲ zagrebian 4 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    How was this principle violated in this case?

    reply

        ▲ moonshinefe 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

        I personally feel like it's not treating user's privacy as "fundamental" to increasingly add telemetry like this. In this case correlating downloads to system installs, and to have that on by default.

        It's fairly hidden first off (what % of users are going to watch the checksums or read these articles?). You also don't seem to get a chance to opt-out of this until after the installation when you can open settings in a normal use case, yet as explained here[1] they'll be attaching the download token to the install and post-install pings[2] which include system information which seems to enable tracking people via metadata across systems.

        The "optional" bit is maybe open to interpretation, but if taken literally it's tracking that's on by default, so the privacy is "optional" here in that sense.

        I get this isn't a big deal for a lot of people, but I dislike that Mozilla has a "manifesto" and talks a huge game about empowering users and privacy when they're treating them as secondary priorities rather than actual principles. It strikes me as disingenuous to claim it's a principle then have a bunch of "buts" in there that are increasingly moving away from the alleged principle, even if it isn't nefarious.

        [1] https://bugzilla.mozilla.org/show_bug.cgi?id=1677497#c0 [2] https://firefox-source-docs.mozilla.org/toolkit/components/t...

        reply

        ▲ kreeben 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

        It gives Mozilla the opportunity to connect my IP address with my browser with my Mozilla account. Mozilla needs to bow down to the US govt and supply them with this information should they have stored it, if the govt feels they need it.

        reply

            ▲ kaba0 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

            You log into your mozilla account from your browser through the goddamn internet. They literally have to have your IP address for that and that adds absolutely zero information than necessary. It is just "people want to be outraged over nothing" yet again.

            reply

                ▲ GekkePrutser 38 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

                You don't have to log in there, and when you do at least you know you're doing it and are aware of the tracking consequences.

                It's very different from sneaking this in under the radar.

                reply

                ▲ 34679 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

                I've used Firefox for years and have never created a Mozilla account.

                reply

    ▲ encryptluks2 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

    reply

▲ cf141q5325 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

From the linked bugzilla https://bugzilla.mozilla.org/show_bug.cgi?id=1677497#c0

>One note, in case it's not already clear: The download token will be available in the telemetry environment, but all web session data that it is linked to will NOT ever be included in telemetry, it is being deliberately kept in a separate data set, and we will be limiting access to the ability to join these data sets to a small set of people.

Small set of people? Pls do tell me more

reply

    ▲ perryizgr8 1 hour ago | parent | next [–]

    This is very alarming. If web session data will never be included in telemetry, why do some people have to ability to query joins? That means it can happen. Why does this small set of people need to access my web session data?

I don't use Firefox regularly, but I have it installed on my computers. I think I'm going to uninstall it completely. This stuff has become more and more common, and is totally unacceptable.

reply

▲ sciurus 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

It's sounds like this is describing the stub attribution feature. You can read more details at

https://wiki.mozilla.org/Firefox/Stub_Attribution

https://bedrock.readthedocs.io/en/latest/stub-attribution.ht...

reply

▲ bradyd 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

From the dltoken_data_review.md [1]:

>> 9) If this data collection is default on, what is the opt-out mechanism for users?

>> Standard Telemetry Opt-Out

If you haven't installed it yet, how can you use the standard telemetry opt-out?

[1] https://bug1677497.bmoattachments.org/attachment.cgi?id=9195...

reply

▲ whatshisface 6 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Package manager installations wouldn't have this problem because everybody gets the same copy of the same binary and associated files, rights?

reply

    ▲ politelemon 6 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    Correct and it's just one of many reasons why checksums and signatures are so important in package managers. There's an automatic enforcement of privacy and integrity.

    reply

        ▲ gary_0 5 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

        Reproducible builds are important as well.

        reply

    ▲ pxeger1 6 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    Package manager installations are normally built from source by the distribution maintainers, not downloaded as binaries from the Mozilla website. So they wouldn't have any "download identifier", unique or not, in them.

    reply

    ▲ Tijdreiziger 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    Chocolatey and WinGet don't.

    Looks like Chocolatey gets the binary from download.mozilla.org [1], while WinGet gets it from download-installer.cdn.mozilla.net [2] (which looks to be the HTTPS repository mentioned in the article, thus being exempt from tracking?)

    [1] https://community.chocolatey.org/packages/Firefox#files

    [2] https://github.com/microsoft/winget-pkgs/blob/master/manifes...

    reply

        ▲ eikenberry 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

        This is the difference between a distribution and a simple package manager. Linux distributions have a more holistic approach to this and enforce it with checksums, signatures, reproducible builds, etc. A package manager really only cares about managing the packages installation, dependencies, etc. Not the integrity of the packages themselves.

        reply

        ▲ easton 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

        Hey, I did that commit to winget-pkgs!

        It doesn't look to me like the tracking stuff is on the HTTPS repo links, so they're probably telling the truth about that. They also ship a version in the Microsoft Store, that should be safe too (I don't think Microsoft shares user identities for free apps with the developers, maybe I'm wrong?)

        reply

    ▲ Arnavion 6 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    Yes. Just like with the Audacity kerfuffle some time ago, it's not a problem for distro packages, only when you get your binaries from upstream.

    reply

        ▲ GekkePrutser 35 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

        Which is what 95% of users would do though.. the average user will use Windows or Mac and has never heard of Chocolatey. Firefox is not in the Mac app store and I guess not on Windows either.

        reply

russdpale 4 hours ago | prev | next [–]

The state of web broswers is so pathetic I wish the government would step in and limit the amount of out right spying that is going on. We have created an entire society which thinks that so long as the data is simply 1 degree removed from anonymity, that everything is ok.

Privacy is largely a mirage, where are our representatives to protect our privacy when the "free" market cannot, and indeed will not, do it for us?

reply

⬆ GekkePrutser 30 minutes ago | parent | next [–]

It's not on the radar of politics. We have some parties in Europe that care about it, but they are all under the flag of pirate parties which is self-defeating IMO. By associating themselves with piracy they always add a negative association to any debate about privacy. Which allows opponents to easily dismiss them with the "people only want privacy because they have something to hide" fallacy.

If they want to be taken seriously they have to grow up and call themselves the privacy party.

Of course there's also a lot all of us could do to make our interests know to mainstream politicians. Because don't forget, our adversaries are spending millions on lobbyists preaching the holy book of big data.

reply

⬆ layer8 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

> This will allow us to […] answer questions like, "Why do we see so many installs per day, but not that many downloads per day?"

That's really not something they should spent much time puzzling over, much less implement tracking IDs for.

reply

⬆ klntsky 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

> This will allow us to track which installs result from which downloads to determine the answers to questions like, "Why do we see so many installs per day, but not that many downloads per day?"

What value does Mozilla see in being able to do that?

reply

⬆ cxr 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

The prevailing belief in the industry is that any problem can be solved with more data, dumpster-grade[1] though it may be. It's appealing to think that it can be used in lieu of just making thoughtful decisions.

1. https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=25016532

reply

⬆ kingcharles 0 minutes ago | parent | prev | next [–]

Does the data even *answer* that question?

All it does is separate out two numbers: downloads and installs.

How does that tell you why someone is installing a specific download on a specific day?

reply

⬆ ahmedfromtunis 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

I have no idea what the actual answer is, but one can image that they want to understand where are people getting these copies of ff if they do not download them themselves.

Why would this be important, again just speculating: to try to leverage whatever channel this might uncover to distribute even more copies of the browser.

Is this ID thing the best way to do it, though? Probably.

reply

⬆ noAnswer 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

> but one can image that they want to understand where are people getting these copies of ff if they do not download them themselves.

These people are getting it obviously from their admins! (Like myself. I push Firefox updates to close to 1000 PCs. I thought (amongst other things) I'm doing them a favour by saving them traffic.) They obviously know that! The real reason they are doing this is simply because they started collecting data. Now they are hooked and constantly want more. That is all there is to it. They already identify each individual installation, so someone on the team said: Let's identify each download too.

reply

⬆ GekkePrutser 22 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

I pushed it to tens of thousands of endpoints in the past :P

Though we have long since moved it to optional. First we moved to Chrome as the "standard browser" due to user requests and eventually our management caved in to Microsoft's constant pushing to make Edge the standard browser. Not that I cared because both are bad for privacy obviously.

But the amount of lobbying for edge that they do makes me really sceptical. It's clearly not about having their pet project succeed, they must have some serious strategy hinging on this. Edge doesn't make them any money on its own as it's a free product so the revenue must come from side channels of its use instead.

Which, considering MS' past with IE and their recent ventures into tracking and advertising in the OS is probably bad news for the end user :(

reply

▲ detaro 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

> *These people are getting it obviously from their admins!*

That's one possibility. And even if you pretend it's the only one, it's still interesting how that's distributed. Is it X admins of 1000-PC orgs, or X*500 people who also install it on dads PC? Count how often each token is used, and you got a histogram, and if you just record that you've not collected anything remotely sensitive about any user. This question can be answered extremely cleanly.

reply

▲ noAnswer 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

I'm an admin of Y orgs + a hand full of private (dad) PCs. The information is useless. They collect it because they can. (Well technically I also push a installation profile that deactivates all known telemetry. So hopefully they get nothing.)

> This question can be answered extremely cleanly.

What was the question again?

reply

▲ foerbert 3 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

Does this even help with that though? Without some further means of identifying users, what use is there in saying download#123 got installed x times? Even if you add the obvious IP information to this, then what? Run GeoIP and say "oh, interesting" when they do or do not correlate?

What could they realistically figure out from this that could help them figure out how people are getting Firefox?

reply

▲ rtpg 1 hour ago | parent | prev | next [–]

That's an easy one, of course. By identifying a "commonly-used installer" (say, some installer stored by some IT team) you could then do things like say with more certainty "no, we do need older installers to keep working". Or reach out to mirrors that have decided to stop updating installers.

From an Ops perspective, having an idea of how your install base is installing your browser can have a lot of implications. And not having the information could easily lead you to accidentally breaking installations for large subsets of your users.

There's also content-market-y stuff involved, of course.

reply

▲ Barrin92 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

the reverse case might be more interesting. Many downloads but few install follow throughs may suggest the installation process is to cumbersome or something along those lines.

reply

▲ bayindirh 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

> A quick check of Chrome installers returned identical hashes each time.

OK, however, are we completely sure that Chrome installer doesn't generate this token on launch and talk with the mothership?

This sounds like whitewashing Chrome just to increase the impact of the article or push Chrome or both.

Like Chrome is not tracking me in and out of the internet and in the kitchen making tea and noting its brand and reporting to Google.

reply

▲ SahAssar 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

The way firefox does it can connect the downloading session with the running session. You can argue with the value or validity of that, but it seems like the chrome installer cant do that, which is nice.

As for why it's in the article I think it's valuable to include it since if chrome was doing it too it might be seen as just "normal", but now it seems even more weird that firefox which is supposed to be the privacy alternative is tracking something that google is not.

reply

▲ brimble 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

Considering that ~everyone was tracking device or installation IDs before Apple cracked down on it, on iOS, I think it's a safe bet that ~everyone is still doing it on desktop, and yeah, generating at install time is probably enough for most use cases and makes your build and distribution processes simpler.

reply

▲ Tijdreiziger 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

Chrome has the X-Client-Data header: https://github.com/bromite/bromite/issues/480

reply

▲ aftbit 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Of which there are (supposedly) only 2^13 possible variants:

> Additionally, a subset of low entropy variations are included in network requests sent to Google. The combined state of these variations is non-identifying, since it is based on a 13-bit low entropy value (see above). These are transmitted using the "X-Client-Data" HTTP header, which contains a list of active variations. On Android, this header may include a limited set of external server-side experiments, which may affect the Chrome installation. This header is used to evaluate the effect on Google servers - for example, a networking change may affect YouTube video load speed or an Omnibox ranking update may result in more helpful Google Search results.

https://www.google.com/chrome/privacy/whitepaper.html#variat...

reply

▲ zagrebian 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

> This sounds like whitewashing Chrome just to increase the impact of the article

I removed ghacks from my RSS reader years ago because that website tends to sensationalize these stories, and I can't stand that.

reply

▲ LordDragonfang 4 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

>OK, however, are we completely sure that Chrome installer doesn't generate this token on launch and talk with the mothership?

That wouldn't give any information about where/when you got the installer from, which is the topic of this article. Doing so would be impossible without embedding information in the exe (which would change the hash).

While I agree that it's a little weird to specifically note it for Google of all companies, the relevance to the article is that Chrome isn't engaging in *this specific type of tracking.*

reply

▲ kbelder 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

      Firefox users who prefer to download the browser without the unique identifier may do so in the
    following two ways:

      Download the Firefox installer from Mozilla's HTTPS repository (formerly the FTP repository).
      Download Firefox from third-party download sites that host the installer, e.g., from Softonic.

It's nuts and another indication Mozilla doesn't understand the reason they exist, but it's not that hard to get around... if you're one of the 0.1% that hears about this.

reply

▲ d110af5ccf 3 hours ago | parent | next [–]

Use a reputable Linux distro and install from the official repos, problem solved. To date the Debian maintainers have proven more trustworthy than 99.99% of the software vendors out there. They also appear to have better security practices than most commercial shops.

reply

▲ lmm 38 minutes ago | root | parent | next [–]

Debian has a deliberate policy of extensively modifying upstream code, including security-critical code, without any dedicated security review. This (predictably) resulted in quite possibly the worst general-purpose software security bug of all time, where SSH and TLS keys generated on Debian machines were effectively blank and supposedly encrypted communications were readable by anyone. Debian has not changed its practices to prevent a reoccurrence and continues to follow the same policy.

I agree that most Debian maintainers are trustworthy and have good intentions, but I would not consider them as having good security practices.

reply

▲ 8bitsrule 2 hours ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

That's a little difficult for 'official repo's that don't include ESR versions.

reply

▲ 5ESS 55 minutes ago | root | parent | prev | next [–]

It's a shame debian flushed their reputation down the drain recently.

reply

▲ ttctciyf 2 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

As of testing 2 minutes ago, downloading from the canonical "latest" location [1] vs. navigating the directory structure of the mentioned repository[2] result in identical files, which (assuming the above info is correct) means my scripted ffox upgrades have omitted the unique id, I guess?

(In my case:)

1: https://download.mozilla.org/?product=firefox-latest-ssl&os=...

2: https://ftp.mozilla.org/pub/firefox/releases/98.0.1/linux-x8...

reply

▲ panarky 2 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

3) Install Firefox from your operating system's repository instead of from Mozilla

reply

▲ xnx 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

This is late-stage Firefox behavior. Like Yahoo in 2012.

reply

▲ b215826 1 hour ago | prev | next [–]

Is this true about the x64 Linux tarball [1] that Mozilla distributes? It's difficult for Mozilla to create new tarballs for each download.

[1]: https://download.mozilla.org/?product=firefox-latest&os=linu...

reply

    ▲ kevincox 1 hour ago | parent | next [–]

    Why would it be difficult to create a different tarball for each download? You can just have a separately compressed section with the random ID that is replaced on-the-fly.

    Non trivial but a couple hours of work to implement and test probably.

    reply

▲ Am4TIfIsER0ppos 23 minutes ago | prev | next [–]

`git checkout v3.6`

Mozilla needs to revert back to 3.6 (or older) and start the last 15 years of development over again.

reply

▲ GekkePrutser 1 hour ago | prev | next [–]

Eek.

At least I'm sure the Firefox that comes in FreeBSD's package system doesn't do this. As with most Linux users. Another reason a FOSS OS is essential.

reply

▲ mastazi 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Wait a second, can someone with more knowledge explain how Google Analytics is related to everything else? I don't understand the following sentence from the article:

> This data will allow us to correlate telemetry IDs with download tokens and Google Analytics IDs.

reply

▲ marginalia_nu 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

This wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't that the entire brand identity of Firefox is Privacy.

It's like discovering there's ham in a vegetarian sandwich. When you ask them they look puzzled and say their focus group was clear it tastes a lot better that way, besides it's just a little bit and the bread is vegetarian and there's way more meat in a Big Mac.

reply

    ▲ detaro 3 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    This also wouldn't be so bad if people were capable of nuance instead of acting as if everything involving data were the same thing. I won't claim Mozilla is in any way perfect, but even as someone who is very much pro-privacy it is a little bit ridiculous how much people loose their shit about tiny things like this and claim there is no difference to what other trackers do.

    reply

        ▲ marginalia_nu 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

        If you position your product as being about privacy, your company about being about privacy, and talk about the importance of online privacy whenever you get any sort of opportunity, then it looks extremely bad if you can't refrain from spying on your users. I don't really think there is any way around this fact.

        If this type of telemetry is necessary for Mozilla to develop software, then perhaps they shouldn't be talking so much about privacy, because as it stands, they're not walking the talk, that's what ultimately looks bad. The telemetry is incidental. Nobody is railing against Microsoft for doing the same thing because they're not constantly seen preaching about how bad it is.

        reply

            ▲ detaro 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

            do you seriously consider counting how many installs are triggered from a download "spying"? Privacy is a bit more complicated than that IMHO.

            reply

                ▲ d110af5ccf 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

                > do you seriously consider counting how many installs are triggered from a download "spying"?

                Yes. It is a unique identifier that they are fully capable of associating with telemetry data and other personal activity. It could be used by various parties to deanonymize me. That is spying. You are playing dishonest semantic games.

                Effective privacy may well be complicated. Perhaps you can maintain effective privacy in various ways even while being actively spied on in some manners. That doesn't mean that spying isn't spying.

reply

     ▲ detaro 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

There is a very large difference between "X is spying on Y" and "X could spy on Y if they started to record and correlate things". And even "I don't trust them not to" is not the same as "they are". A lot about privacy involves not looking at things you could look at.

E.g. picking the example mentioned repeatedly in this discussion: Network transfers annoyingly involve IP addresses. That doesn't mean every server you talk to is spying on you, and there is wide a range from "doesn't record anything", over "keeps a log of errors for 5 days that's only used for debugging", over "looks in GeoIP database and counts visitors per country", to "immediately connects your IP to your user profile and shares that data packet with 50 ad networks". I have a hard time calling the first three "spying", it starts IMHO somewhere after that. And annoyingly, telling the difference comes down to trust at some point.

Or even simpler, I could trivially spy on my neighbors with what reaches my apartment. I don't though.

reply

▲ gandalfff 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

I don't really understand telemetry. How is Google Analytics helping them to improve the browser? Is it to see which features are actually being used?

reply

     ▲ brimble 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

Imagine you could stick a camera over your users' shoulders, mostly without them knowing you're doing it, instead of doing actual user research.

That's what the stuff's for. Some of the tools for these things record entire sessions, including mouse movements. It's creepy as hell and even the tamest of "telemetry" 100% would have gotten something classed, unambiguously, as spyware, in the distant past of ~15-20 years ago.

reply

     ▲ emerged 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

They ignore their users in all other aspects so it seems unlikely to be driven by that.

reply

▲ akselmo 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

I would not download anything from Softonic. I know it's just an example but if you download anything from there you might get few surprises with the download.

reply

▲ brimble 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

How... does that play nicely with signing and notarization on Windows and Mac? Asking for a friend :-)

reply

▲ freediver 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Zero telemetry is the only way to go for a modern browser with a sense of decency for the web and the users.

I invite everyone on a Mac to try and support Orion browser - zero telemetry by default.

reply

▲ idonotknowwhy 4 hours ago | prev | next [–]

So downloading from the arch Linux repo via pacman, I don't have a unique ID?

reply

     ▲ encryptluks2 4 hours ago | parent | next [–]

No, but unless you go tweak a bunch of things you are still sending your information to Mozilla. Also, they've had a few "convenient" bugs that reverted privacy settings in the past.

reply

▲ rkagerer 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

How long has it been that way?

reply

     ▲ cf141q5325 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

https://bugzilla.mozilla.org/show_bug.cgi?id=1677497 Its from a year ago

reply

▲ noobermin 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Mozilla is fast becoming the bad guy even when they are pitched as the "alternative to google (as in chrome)." This is so disappointing.

reply

▲ humanwhosits 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Are we accidentally avoiding this when the firefox is provided pre-installed by ubuntu/fedora?

reply

▲ fleddr 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

"Mozilla notes that the opt-out mechanism is the standard Telemetry opt-out. How users may opt-out before the installation of Firefox is unclear."

As dry as German humor gets :)

reply

▲ throwaway48375 35 minutes ago | prev | next [–]

I'm seriously considering switching from Firefox. I put a lot of effort into avoiding advertisements on all my devices and then Firefox goes and hijacks my system to show me an advertisement for some Disney+ movie and now this.

I was able to disable the ads with an about:config modification and I always get my installers from ftp.mozilla.org so this didn't even personally effect me, but still I feel betrayed.

reply

▲ aetherspawn 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

No tracking codes will be used if the user has DNT set, which is most people who care about not being tracked.

reply

▲ tag2103 4 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Oh look- yet another company that has been discovered to be dishonest in their approach to user privacy.

reply

▲ gjsman-1000 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

I hate WebKit and Blink's domination as much as anyone, but rather than put up a strong fight, Firefox is *begging* to lose.

And unfortunately, I can't help but admit that Firefox *deserves* to lose (not just from this, but from other terrible decisions added up), even if the consequences of a web monoculture are terrible.

reply

    ▲ noobermin 3 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    How much of the drama of the last three years can be laid squarely at the feet of the CEO who gave themselves a raise right when they laid off the MDN staff?

    reply

▲ wooque 2 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Firefox doesn't have stellar privacy record anyway https://privacytests.org/

reply

▲ mindslight 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

IMO as market optimization turns the screws ever harder, the escape hatch is to head towards source distributions. Outrage articles are only necessary because people have come to rely on these monolithic binary downloads with their "channels" and "installers" and "auto updaters", that are gatekept by centralized entities like Mozilla. Whereas if say the source tarball used by Nix is engaging in similar shenanigans, that is fixable with a self-applied patch rather than needing to convince Mozilla to change.

reply

▲ blibble 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

how does this get through the MS smartscreen and authenticode checks?

reply

    ▲ dataflow 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    In fact this *is* how you get past SmartScreen checks. Windows freaks out a lot more when it sees the same file being downloaded by lots of people, but if you make them all different, then it calms down.

    reply

    ▲ laurent123456 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    As long as the executable is signed (and it must be), and the company well known, Windows should be fine with it.

    reply

▲ datavirtue 1 hour ago | prev | next [–]

I just disabled internet access for Firefox. Let's see if it phones home again.

reply

▲ hosteur 4 hours ago | prev | next [–]

How is this not a blatant violation of EU GDPR?

This is involuntary non informed tracking.

reply

    ▲ woodruffw 3 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    My understanding of the GDPR is that it doesn't apply if the analytics are fully anonymized, and only partially applies if the analytics are pseudonymous[1]. It's exceedingly likely that one of these cases applies, since the ID in question is tied to a single Mozilla *installation*, not individual user or even browser profile.

[1]: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/data-protection/guidance-staff-student...
reply

▲ Wojakmeme 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Opt-out after tracking already happend? Sounds GDPR violating to me.

reply

    ▲ Teandw 4 hours ago | parent | next [–]

That's not how GDPR works. This isn't gathering personal data, PII or anything similar so wouldn't fall under the scope of GDPR.

reply

        ▲ pbhjpbhj 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

IP address can be PII.

What are they hooking the download tracking code to if not IPs?

If you sign up for a Mozilla account, providing PII, are you saying they then throw away the link between the install and original download?

reply

▲ knodi 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

wtf Mozilla, why are you making me stop using you?

reply

    ▲ kaba0 2 hours ago | parent | next [–]

How is it making you stop using it?

Like, people can't see the difference between "telemetry" done by supermarkets by counting an approximate number of visitors vs the full-on knowing your childhood best-friends' secret crush on you. There is eons of difference between the two.

reply

    ▲ seba_dos1 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

As if there was any serious alternative that wasn't much worse.

reply

        ▲ tick_tock_tick 5 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

I mean if they both are going off the deep end for tracking chrome is faster and a ton of developers seem to only care if it works on chrome....

reply

            ▲ seba_dos1 3 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

Well, Firefox' tracking is usually meant for determining things like where did the installer came from and collecting feature usage data, while Google's is all about building marketing profiles to sell targeted ads. You decide how bad each of them is.

reply

▲ EastSmith 3 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Dead browser moves.

reply

▲ gjsman-1000 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Remember what happened when Firefox OS died? It was forked into KaiOS, which has become a superior product that actually found a market.

I will not mourn the death of Mozilla. When it collapses, may it be forked and turn into something decent by more competent leaders who don't give themselves multimillion dollar salaries and make pointless acquisitions.

reply

    ▲ soundnote 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

But KaiOS is not a high status Cali techie project.

reply

▲ gjsman-1000 5 hours ago | prev | next [–]

How much R&D do you think Firefox squandered on making a custom installer generator for every download and being unable to cache the files on a cheap CDN?

reply

    ▲ oh_sigh 4 hours ago | parent | next [–]

Not much? I did exactly this when I worked on a really popular P2P file sharing client (at one point estimated to be installed on >15% of all PCs worldwide). It even improved our actual installs, but that is probably about just using an ultralight weight installer rather than having a tracking ID integrated into it. It literally took me a week. Granted, things were really fast and loose back then. It would probably take me 2 years and a team of engineers to do a similar thing at my current FANG job.

reply

▲ dmead 6 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Why?

reply

▲ pxeger1 6 hours ago | prev | next [–]

Is the current Mozilla CEO a plant by Google with the goal of driving Mozilla into the ground as much as possible? I don't understand how they can keep fucking up their business so badly.

reply

    ▲ soundnote 5 hours ago | parent | next [–]

    "The simplest way to explain the behavior of any bureaucratic organization is to assume that it is controlled by a cabal of its enemies."

    reply

    ▲ wubbert 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    Mozilla does get a lot of their funding from Google...

    reply

    ▲ peakaboo 5 hours ago | parent | prev | next [–]

    A download identifier really isn't that bad. Maybe they need to actually show some numbers of their downloads to justify budgets and other things.

    It's not like they are having tracking JavaScript on 80% of the worlds Web sites like someone else I know, starting with Googl...

    reply

        ▲ paranoidrobot 5 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

        Download counts dont need you to embed a unique token.

        At the most basic level, you can get this by doing a count over http logs.

        reply

            ▲ charcircuit 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

            To tell how many downloads result in an actual install http logs are not enough. You will get extra noise on top of the data you care about.

            reply

                ▲ paranoidrobot 2 hours ago | root | parent | next [–]

                Download to install conversion also doesn't need an embedded token.

                It could be obtained through other data that doesn't need to track the individual install.

                I forget if Firefox has a 'welcome' page that it shows on first launch, but it could serve as the count of number of installs.

                I believe Firefox also has an auto update system, so that too could serve as an Active Users count.

                Lots of ways that you can derive this data without needing to track individual download to installation.

                reply

▲ lostgame 5 hours ago | prev [–]

Okay, first the stupid fucking 'Turning Red' advertisement that dared to call itself 'adorable', and now this?

Seriously, does FireFox hate itself, or just hates it's dwindling but loyal user base?

We used to use Firefox because they *didn't* do shit like this.

I actually deleted Firefox after about 15 years of loyal use after the 'Turning Red' incident. Glad to hear I made the right call.

I've been using Safari and have no regrets.

Goodbye, Firefox. Good riddance, if this is how you'll behave.

It's sad to watch the dream of a mainstream open-source browser that wasn't evil vanish.

We will need something else, but I don't see huge potential adoption for anything.

It was hard enough to get people to swap browsers in the 00's, it's gonna be way harder with each platform pushing its own pre-installed browser.

reply