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**CYBERSECURITY BULLETIN**

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**COOKIES AND YOUR ONLINE PRIVACY**



Although, you might not know what they are or how they work, if you go online, it's likely you've heard of cookies before. But given the negative publicity surrounding them, perhaps you have been led to believe they are dangerous. On the contrary, cookies by themselves are rather harmless and simple. However, if privacy issues concern you, there's always the option to opt-out.

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## **First, an introduction to cookies**

Cookies are small text files that are placed on your computer or mobile device by websites you visit or certain emails you open. In essence a cookie notifies a website when you return. Think of a cookie as a unique and personal identification card. There are different types of cookies; some are optional while others are strictly necessary for a website to work properly.

Their main purpose is to make websites work, or work more efficient, as well as to provide important business and marketing information about you to the site. As a result, they allow websites to personalize the content you see based on your browsing preferences and habits, such as language and geographical region.

A tracking cookie is a specific type of cookie that is distributed, shared, and read across two or more unrelated websites for the purpose of collecting information or to offer you a customized experience. Not all cookies are tracking cookies.



## **A tracking cookie at work**

To illustrate a scenario of a cookie at work, picture this, you visit a website that hosts online advertising from a third-party vendor. Consequently, as an advertiser on the site, that third party vendor has the ability to place a cookie on your computer. If they decide to place a cookie on your computer and you visit another website that also has advertisement from the same third-party vendor, then that vendor will know you have visited both websites. Of course nothing malicious has occurred, but now the vendor is able to indirectly determine all the sites you visit if they have cookies present on those sites. This is just one example; cookies can collect a variety of other information.

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### **Information collected by cookies**

Cookies are able to capture a wealth of information, but they are not able to collect or steal your private information. They track behavioral information like the pages and content you look at, when and how often you visit, what you search for, whether you clicked on an ad or link, geographic region, language preferences, and device features.

### **Privacy or security implications**

As you can see, cookies and the information they store can pose privacy concerns but rather low security concerns. Yet, there are some security companies and free spyware removal tools that emphasize the detection of cookies in their software, don't let this fear mongering confuse you. Tracking cookies are NOT malicious or harmful like malware, worms, or viruses, although they can pose privacy concerns.

In this digital age we have become accustomed to targeted content. It's just a matter of how much we want or do not want advertisers and corporations to know about our Internet surfing habits and how much of this personalized behavioral advertising we want to see.

### **How to protect your privacy**

If after reading the facts you are still concerned about cookies, there are a few measures you can take to protect your privacy. First, be selective about which websites you chose to visit. Second, remember you can always opt-out or decide the level of information you wish to share, so check your browser's privacy settings. Most browsers have settings, which allow you to establish your preferences for cookies, allowing you to delete or block them from your computer.

### **Reference:**

#### **This was cross posted from:**

<https://community.norton.com/en/blogs/norton-protection-blog/cookies-and-your-online-privacy-30sectech-video>

### **DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE? TALK TO US.**

#### **POCs:**

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