

ONLINE PRIVACY UNDER ATTACK

As use of the Internet continues to grow, so does concern regarding the loss of privacy. On February 10 2000, the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), a Washington-based advocacy and litigation group which focuses on privacy issues involved in computer and Internet technologies, filed a complaint with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) alleging that the online information collection practices of DoubleClick and its business partners constitute unfair and deceptive trade practices.

DoubleClick is a leading provider of Internet-based advertising services. The company places messages on behalf of advertisers on Web sites that are part of the "DoubleClick Network," which consists of highly-trafficked Web sites grouped together by DoubleClick in

being viewed. As a user visits Web sites that utilize DoubleClick's technology, DART collects information regarding the user and his or her viewing activities and ad responses. This information is then aggregated in a database and used to personalize the ads people see when they visit any of the DoubleClick network of Web sites. This use of cookies to create profiles on online user activity is not unique to DoubleClick and is also utilized by many of its competitors.

DoubleClick describes DART as a technology which matches advertiser-selected target profiles with individual user profiles and delivers an appropriately targeted ad. In contrast, the complaint filed by EPIC alleges that:

"DoubleClick Inc. has engaged and is engaging

A privacy policy published by DoubleClick in 1997 stated that "DoubleClick does not know the name, e-mail address, phone number, or home address of anybody who visits a site in the DoubleClick Network. All users who receive an ad targeted by DoubleClick's technology remain completely anonymous." DoubleClick's business partners have similarly represented that DoubleClick cookies generated by their Web sites were anonymous and that no per-

sonal information was collected. DoubleClick's software, each time the program is used, includes the user's music preferences, the number of songs stored on the user's hard disk and a unique identifier which is assigned to the user when the software is registered. The IP address of the user's computer would also be revealed as part of each transmission. This information can then be combined with the user's e-mail address and ZIP code, both of which must be provided during the registration process. Users who reg-

Internet search engines which do not permit third parties to view recent searches. Many popular search engines allow third parties to monitor searches being performed on their indexes.

- Avoid using services such as Alexis which is used to follow you around while you surf the Web.
- If you use Netscape Navigator, be sure to turn off the "Smart Browsing/What's Related" feature.
- Make sure your browser does not know your e-mail address. Such addresses can be easily extracted by Web sites you visit.
- If possible, avoid subscribing to an "always on" Internet service (such as from your cable company) if the company will assign your PC an Internet Protocol (IP) address which will remain constant. Bell Sympatico's High Speed DSL service will force a different IP address on your computer every few hours. Visit <http://privacy.net/> to check if your computer is always being assigned the same IP address and to also view what other valuable information is being disclosed by your computer. Also, turn off your computer or disconnect the modem when not in use.
- If you want to visit Web sites with greater anonymity, consider using a service such as Anonymizer at <http://www.anonymizer.com>
- Delete confidential client documents from your home computer after you have finished working on them and transferred them to the office computer.
- Use virus protection software to scan all new software you download from the Internet.
- Avoid purchasing a computer with an Intel Pentium III processor unless it permits you to turn off the ability to read the unique serial number embedded in each such processor.
- When installing new software that requires registration, choose an offline registration mechanism (for instance, print and fax the registration) rather than permitting the software to communicate with the vendor directly through the Internet. ☺