

Have some cookies, whether you like them or not!

The online sites we visit are storing ever more detailed information about us, from personal data such as our name, home address and telephone number, to information about how we behave online and what we search for the most. This has led Internet users to question the necessity of such a practice and to demand that it is made clear how their data is collected, used, stored and shared.



BILL TAYLOR
Managing Director
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1 The way online businesses collect information on their customers today is no different to the methods that have been used for years by shops. Back then, a customer would be handed a questionnaire to fill in, indicating their preferences for products, commenting on their experience in the shop and making suggestions on improving customer service; now information collection is carried out by Web browser cookies and other highly sophisticated technologies that retailers use on their websites.

Our goal is to draw a picture of how a consumer interacts with us online so as to improve the overall shopping experience for them, as well as to target our own advertising accordingly. For instance, based on a shopper's search history, past purchases and spending habits, we alert the shopper to special offers and suggest products and services that may be of particular interest to them. This helps retailers obtain loyal customers who spend more, while shoppers receive discounts and a personalised shopping experience — it's a win-win situation. On the whole, people do not object when their online activity is being followed in this way, because they benefit from it.



2 The amount of online data collected by companies is mind-boggling. Apart from tracking a user's every move as they navigate through a website, they also obtain location data through the IP address of the user's device which further helps to build a detailed profile of them. While this may