

# Re: Protesting google groups

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.math/2005-08/msg01351.html>

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- *From:* quasi <quasi@xxxxxxxx>
  - *Date:* Sun, 07 Aug 2005 15:58:32 -0700
- 

On Sun, 07 Aug 2005 13:38:20 -0500, David C. Ullrich  
<ullrich@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

>On Sun, 07 Aug 2005 09:23:27 -0700, quasi <quasi@xxxxxxxx> wrote:

>

>>On Sun, 07 Aug 2005 06:21:57 -0500, David C. Ullrich

>><ullrich@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

>>

>>>On Sat, 6 Aug 2005 16:35:02 -0600, "gb7648" <gb7648@xxxxxxxx> wrote:

>>>

>>>>the message is stop archiving all groups messages because the way its set up it violates privacy

>>>

>>>I know I'm going to regret asking this...

>>>

>>>Exactly how does it violate privacy?

>>>

>>>(You're not suggesting that messages that you intentionally  
>>>posted on usenet, where you know that anyone anywhere can  
>>>read them, are supposed to be private, are you?)

>>>

>>>>and creates miseries in people's lives

>>>>

>>>

>>Google is kind of an electronic ankle monitor.

>>

>>Here are 9 specific concerns which I found on the net:

>>

>>1. Google's immortal cookie:

>>

>>Google was the first search engine to use a cookie that expires in  
>>2038. This was at a time when federal websites were prohibited from  
>>using persistent cookies altogether. Now it's years later, and  
>>immortal cookies are commonplace among search engines; Google set the  
>>standard because no one bothered to challenge them. This cookie places  
>>a unique ID number on your hard disk. Anytime you land on a Google  
>>page, you get a Google cookie if you don't already have one. If you  
>>have one, they read and record your unique ID number.

>

>Two questions about that:

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>

>(i) Exactly what information does this cookie return to Google?

>(My impression is that it can't return anything except information  
>that \_you\_ have sent \_Google\_. It can't tell Google what your name  
>is unless you told Google your name. It can tell Google what you  
>searched for the last time you were there. Calling that a violation  
>of privacy seems ridiculous – if you don't want Google to know  
>that you're searching for information on gazebos then using  
>\_Google\_ to search for information on gazebos seems a little  
>dumb, doesn't it?)

>

>(ii) Does it still place this cookie on a system where the

>browser has been set not to accept cookies?

>

>>2. Google records everything they can:

>>

>>For all searches they record the cookie ID, your Internet IP address,  
>>the time and date, your search terms, and your browser configuration.  
>>Increasingly, Google is customizing results based on your IP number.  
>>This is referred to in the industry as "IP delivery based on  
>>geolocation."

>

>Same comments as above.

>

>>3. Google retains all data indefinitely:

>>

>>Google has no data retention policies. There is evidence that they are  
>>able to easily access all the user information they collect and save.

>

>(There's a typo somewhere in that last sentence, right?)

>

>Again, so? How is this a violation of privacy?

>

>>4. Google won't say why they need this data:

>

>So?

>

>>Inquiries to Google about their privacy policies are ignored. When the  
>>New York Times (2002–11–28) asked Sergey Brin about whether Google  
>>ever gets subpoenaed for this information, he had no comment.

>

>If you were complaining about the recent revisions to the Bill of

>Rights I'd be with you. Google is not in charge of US policy.

>

>>5. Google hires spooks:

>>

>>Matt Cutts, a key Google engineer, used to work for the National  
>>Security Agency. Google wants to hire more people with security  
>>clearances, so that they can peddle their corporate assets to the  
>>spooks in Washington.

>

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>Uh, supposing for the sake of argument that this is all exactly  
>>true, I don't see what it has to do with Google violating users'  
>privacy.  
>  
>(I actually don't think that having worked for the NSA should  
>mean that you're barred from private employment. And I can think  
>of other reasons they might want to hire people from the NSA.  
>(They might want to hire someone who's an expert in online  
>security issues. They might want to hire a really really really  
>good programmer.))  
>  
>>6. Google's toolbar is spyware:  
>>  
>>With the advanced features enabled, Google's free toolbar for Explorer  
>>phones home with every page you surf, and yes, it reads your cookie  
>>too. Their privacy policy confesses this, but that's only because  
>>Alexa lost a class-action lawsuit when their toolbar did the same  
>>thing, and their privacy policy failed to explain this. Worse yet,  
>>Google's toolbar updates to new versions quietly, and without asking.  
>>This means that if you have the toolbar installed, Google essentially  
>>has complete access to your hard disk every time you connect to Google  
>>(which is many times a day). Most software vendors, and even  
>>Microsoft, ask if you'd like an updated version. But not Google. Any  
>>software that updates automatically presents a massive security risk.  
>  
>I didn't know any of that. These are not good things (although  
>there are ways to avoid them, for example not using the Google  
>toolbar.)  
>  
>>7. Google's cache copy is illegal:  
>>  
>>Judging from Ninth Circuit precedent on the application of U.S.  
>>copyright laws to the Internet, Google's cache copy appears to be  
>>illegal. The only way a webmaster can avoid having his site cached on  
>>Google is to put a "noarchive" meta in the header of every page on his  
>>site. Surfers like the cache, but webmasters don't. Many webmasters  
>>have deleted questionable material from their sites, only to discover  
>>later that the problem pages live merrily on in Google's cache. The  
>>cache copy should be "opt-in" for webmasters, not "opt-out."  
>  
>If the cache is actually illegal you should call the cops, not  
>post here. I wouldn't know anything about the law.  
>  
>But whether it's illegal or not, the idea that that cache has  
>something to do with `_privacy_` is patently absurd. We're talking  
>about information that people `_published_`.  
>  
>Presumably(?) you'd forgotten that the question was about how  
>Google violates people's privacy, and you're branching out into  
>how Google is evil in general? The idea that there's something  
>nasty about that cache also seems pretty silly, if not quite

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>as ridiculous as the idea that it amounts to a violation of  
>privacy. I gather they \_do\_ respect a noarchive meta?  
>  
>I mean it sometimes happens, not that often, that I post  
>something I wish I hadn't posted. When that happens I  
>wish I hadn't posted it – I don't try to get every computer  
>in the universe to delete any copies it may have.  
>  
>>8. Google is not your friend:  
>>  
>>By now Google enjoys a 75 percent monopoly for all external referrals  
>>to most websites. Webmasters cannot avoid seeking Google's approval  
>>these days, assuming they want to increase traffic to their site. If  
>>they try to take advantage of some of the known weaknesses in Google's  
>>semi-secret algorithms, they may find themselves penalized by Google,  
>>and their traffic disappears. There are no detailed, published  
>>standards issued by Google, and there is no appeal process for  
>>penalized sites.  
>  
>Lemme get this straight. Google is evil because it stores  
>information about everything forever. But now the fact that  
>it doesn't store \_everything\_ is \_also\_ evidence that it's  
>evil.  
>  
>Don't bother to try to explain how Google's refusal to  
>list my site is a violation of my privacy.  
>  
>>Google is completely unaccountable.  
>  
>That's correct. It's not an example of how Google violates  
>people's privacy, it's a simple \_fact\_. They are a private  
>company with a web site, and within certain restrictions  
>(libel, etc) they can post whatever they want on their  
>site. You got one right.  
>  
>>Most of the time  
>>Google doesn't even answer email from webmasters.  
>  
>They didn't ever answer the one or two emails I've sent them  
>about this or that. Curious that I didn't realize that their  
>failure to reply was a violation of my privacy.  
>  
>>Webmasters cannot avoid seeking Google's approval  
>>these days, assuming they want to increase traffic to their site.  
>  
>We're talking about webmasters using various tricks to increase  
>their ranking. Again, Google is free to exclude whoever they wish.  
>The fact that they do exclude people who appear to be trying to  
>trick The Algorithm is a \_good\_ thing. When I search for information  
>on gazebos I'd like to find the best gazebo sites, not the sites  
>that are best at tricking Google into thinking that they're good

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>gazebo sites.  
>  
>I'm not saying that those tricks should be illegal – webmasters  
>other than Google should also be free to post what they feel  
>like posting, including comments they think are going to make  
>them popular with Google. But here it's the webmasters posting  
>the tricks who are being Bad.  
>  
>>9. Google is a privacy time bomb:  
>>  
>>With 200 million searches per day, most from outside the U.S., Google  
>>amounts to a privacy disaster waiting to happen. Those  
>>newly-commissioned data-mining bureaucrats in Washington can only  
>>dream about the sort of slick efficiency that Google has already  
>>achieved.  
>  
>I can't believe that people are going along with the sort of  
>things that the slimy bastards in Washington have been pulling.  
>No sarcasm meant there at all. But (if this is what you're getting  
>at, not sure) the fact that the government is getting enthusiastic  
>about invading people's privacy isn't google's fault.  
>  
>Maybe I'm missing your point on this last one.  
>  
>\*\*\*\*\*  
>  
>David C. Ullrich

First, let me clarify one thing right away. Those 9 points are not mine -- I copied them off a web page about a year ago. I have done no independent investigation of my own and so I can't vouch for the validity of the claims. But they are concerns.

In discussions I had with others when I first came across these issues, it became clear that Google's permanent cookie is well known to those working to defend individual privacy.

Here are the key claims, which I can't verify, and which apparently Google won't affirm or deny:

(1) Google's cookie is hidden differently -- that is, it's not a normal cookie which is erased if you delete all cookies and similarly, it's not blocked if you block cookies.

(2) The cookie data is transmitted to Google, so it's not just stored locally on your PC. Also, the data stored and transmitted includes your machine's physical ID (for PCs with Intel chips), and hardware configuration, so even if you reformat your hard drive, they probably still know who you are (or at least they know it's the same PC). They also store and transmit the IP address.

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(3) Do they know your name? Well, if they know the machine ID, the hardware configuration, and the IP address for each search, then who needs a name — what they have is a kind of DNA. Of course, any investigative agency can always use the IP address to get the name. Would Google demand a subpoena before releasing such data? Who knows? Based on Google's lack of openness, I suspect a subpoena wouldn't be needed — maybe just a phone call.

Now Is there anything illegal about this? Maybe not, but if Google is indeed hiding its actions, and refuses to answer questions about it, then that's enough to make me wonder.

Also, the top individuals at Google are apparently very closely tied to the Bush administration, and based on the record of the Bush administration as far as respect for privacy and individual rights, I think the potential for abuse of the data they collect is a real concern. Put it this way, if Google had been around in the McCarthy era, I wouldn't be surprised if their data was voluntarily handed over to some agency to be scanned for potential "communist sympathizers".

Ok, maybe this is just paranoia, but these are scary times — individual rights are clearly being erased, little by little, under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

There's a quote by someone, I don't know who, which goes something like this:

"I know I'm paranoid, but the question is, am I paranoid enough?"

quasi

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### • *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ ***Re: Protesting google groups***  
◇ *From:* matt271829-news

### • *References:*

- ◆ ***Re: Protesting google groups***  
◇ *From:* David C . Ullrich
- ◆ ***Re: Protesting google groups***  
◇ *From:* quasi
- ◆ ***Re: Protesting google groups***  
◇ *From:* David C . Ullrich

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