FTC proposes Do Not Track tool for Web marketing

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Federal regulators are proposing to create a "Do Not Track" tool for the Internet so that people could prevent marketers from tracking their Web browsing habits and other online behavior in order to target advertising.

The proposal, inspired by the government's existing "Do Not Call" registry for telemarketers, is one of a series of recommendations outlined in a privacy report released Wednesday by the Federal Trade Commission. The report lays out a broad framework for protecting consumer privacy both online and offline as personal data collection becomes ubiquitous - often without consumer knowledge.

The FTC hopes the report will help guide the marketing industry as it develops self-regulatory principles to define acceptable corporate behavior and inform lawmakers and other policymakers as they draft new rules of the road to protect privacy. The FTC has limited authority to write those rules itself, so new regulations would likely require congressional action.

Protecting consumer privacy, the agency says, is critical as marketers - particularly online marketers - are analyzing the websites consumers visit, the online links they click, Internet searches, online and offline purchases, the physical locations of cell phones and other wireless devices and all sorts of personal information disclosed on social networking sites.

The FTC envisions a Do Not Track tool as a way to give consumers more control over all this data collection. FTC chairman Jon Leibowitz first floated the idea in congressional testimony over the summer.

The concept is loosely based on the FTC's National Do Not Call Registry, which was initiated in 2003 and has been widely acclaimed for allowing Americans to eat their suppers in peace. More than 190 million people have listed their phones on the registry, which prohibits calls from telemarketers. Violating the registry subjects telemarketers to civil penalties up to $16,000 per violation.

SOURCE [1]

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