

SO YOU THINK THAT ADVERTISERS CANNOT TRACK YOU ON SMARTPHONES: YOU'RE WRONG. THEY CAN AND DO



It is erroneously believed that advertisers cannot track users on smartphones, in the same manner as they can on personal computers; because the truth is that they can and do. Take for example Apple. It is presumed to be posing the biggest impediment to mobile tracking. Apple uses UDID, the distinctive appliance identifiers which appliance developers use to track user activities, through a process of decryption of encoded information that allows them to assess a part of the user's behavior and then determine the rest based on that vital information. However, Apple is not insistent about using UDID and once returned appliance that wanted to use UDIDs, to access information about users for advertising purposes. Given that it was not to keen on using UDID, it is paradoxical that it is introducing an alternative system, with its latest mobile operating system update, called the Advertising Identifier. Now this is how Advertising ID could be used to stalk users. Presuming someone is playing a mobile game, let's say Monopoly, and needs to buy virtual currency to acquire some property. He gets bored after some time and switches to another game. With Apple's Advertising ID and an affiliation between the two games Lyfe Mobile, through its unique interactive content, via Apple's smartphone application, provide it with an engaging medium to interact with consumers and enable it to promote a virtual currency discount to the user based on his interest in the first game, even though he has left it and switched to another. However, the Advertising ID is more aware of privacy issues and while the identifier can be used to target ads, it also allows the users to opt out of the system and not allow them to be tracked. Kevin Trilli, vice president of product at Truste, an online security and privacy firm, said that while it was nice that users could opt out from being tracked, it was highly unlikely that they would do so. Moreover, to stop companies already tracking the device, the user has to reset it. "Who wants to reset their phone to delete a cookie?" he wondered. In a highly competitive market Apple's objective was perhaps to deal with privacy matters and potential legal issues but also to grant access to marketers who would want to target and track mobile users. Charlie Lambropoulos, co-founder of mobile ad firm Lyfe Mobile shared the same opinion and said that Apple permitted Lyfe Mobile to match users across appliances. However, Apple cannot be charged with starting something innovative, it is merely following in the footsteps of Google. Its Android browser allows cookie dropping and marketers can track the unique IDs of devices on which the mobile operating system functions. Facebook has managed to address the issues by placing security walls around tracking of its users and has already announced plans of trying out a third-party mobile ad network that would enable brands to track consumers, using Facebook data, but on non-Facebook appliances. Facebook assures that it will protect and safeguard the user's Facebook ID, yet releasing a huge amount of data, to allow for more scientific ad targeting as compared to a mobile's contextual environment. Why Apple and Google and the others are keen to allow this facility is that without mobile advertizing becomes limited as advertisers are loathe to advertisers on a medium without being aware of their target audiences actions, identities and interests. Moreover, as long as the appliance seeks users permission it stays within legal limits. Be it the social media giant, Google or Apple, whoever manages to come up with a secure method of addressing privacy issues and yet let in ad trackers, the benefits will accrue to all.